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# Guthild

Verathy Canfield





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# Sunhild

A NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN EPISODE

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BY  
DOROTHY CANFIELD



NEW YORK  
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1907

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# GUNHILD

## I

### A Black Day

**A** GAINST the deep voice of the never-ending rain, the agitation in the Hotel Naesvangen exploded in a series of staccato shocks. Doors opened and shut with a vehemence and rapidity unheard of in that placid, deserted little hostelry, and two maids clattered up and down stairs, in a hurried heaviness contrasting oddly with the bird-like flashing of their bright-coloured peasant costumes. Kaptejn Rivedal, no longer captain of his own inn, stood in calm confusion, trying vainly to remember the few words of English he had learned during his active sea-faring life, and discovering to his dismay that the only phrases left to him after the long years of his retirement were a few objurgations, picturesque but highly unsuitable for the present occasion. He

interrupted the agonising attempt at conversation to call out a command towards the kitchen to hurry the fire, as the sick lady needed the hot water at once.

The tall, dark young foreigner, confronting him fiercely, gave an impatient exclamation at this interruption, and instantly began the attack again.

"Oh, *try* to understand!" he cried, gesticulating impetuously. "It seems as though you'd *have* to, when I talk so slowly and distinctly. Why, any dog in New York could understand as much as that. Now listen." He spoke a single sentence with the most painful deliberation. "We must have somebody here who can speak English—*taler Engelsk*, you know," and then in a burst of desperation, "I don't care if you have to drive fifty miles to get him."

Kaptejn Rivedal with the calm of hopelessness responded, in the most deliberate and intelligible Norwegian, that he had already sent for the only interpreter available and that she would be at the hotel in three hours. He added to himself as he finished, "God save us! how can any one be so dense

as not to understand so simple a thing. Why, my very horses could take that in."

After this interchange of courtesy, the two men faced each other in a momentary silence. A tall young woman came rapidly down the stairs and into the room of conflict. "Well, Harry, how are you getting on?" she asked in a clear, penetrating voice. "Are you making them understand?"

"I am *not*! I began by trying to ask for a doctor or some remedies, but I'm reduced to demanding that somebody be procured who can speak English. How's poor Aunt Nancy?"

"I've helped her to bed, and there's a fire in the room, and we're going to have some hot water soon. Pollie mustered enough Norwegian for that. She picked up a few words, playing with those children at the hotel in Bergen." The young man thrust his hands deep into his coat pockets with an effect of finality. The gesture was American, like his speech, although he looked like a Latin, his dark hair *coupé en brosse* and his moustache brushed up lightly at the ends. As he went on, although the words were

those of a New Yorker, the vivacity of his impatience was Parisian. "Why, for Heaven's sake send her down here then, and see what she can do. I've tried this old Viking in every language I know a word of. What does Baedeker mean by saying you can get along everywhere in Norway with only English!"

"I suppose he didn't dream tourists would ever drop into such a forsaken little hole as this—what's the old man going to do now?"

Kaptejn Rivedal had had an inspiration. Advancing to the clock on the wall, he faced the two young people again and began once more his polite, deliberate speech. "I have sent for some one who can speak English. It is now three o'clock. She will be here at six." He pointed to the clock and moved imaginary hands around its face, finishing by saying with a grave dignity, in imitation of the voice of the old timepiece, "Ding—ding-ding-ding-ding-ding!" The young man looked at the girl in a very passion of bewilderment and threw his hands out despairingly.

“Never mind—we’ll get on somehow—here comes Pollie.” She turned to the door, and as the child rushed tempestuously into the room she began to speak. Her voice was quite drowned in the little girl’s high-pitched and irrepressible volley: “Oh, I say, sister! Isn’t Aunt Nancy the trump—the brick! There she lies under that frightful feather bed, her sciatica just running red-hot pins in her, and smiling and cracking jokes about Harry being stuck for a language for once in his life. I just wish she were my really aunt, instead of Harry’s.” She was opening her mouth to run on, when the young man, catching her by a handful of the black elf-locks that fell about her brown face, drew her to him and put his hand over her lips. “Now, Pollie Morton, you keep still for half a minute while I talk. Poor Aunt Nancy is very sick with sciatica and we must have a doctor or some medicine for her. We can’t have that until we can get somebody who can talk English here. I’ve been asking the landlord for an interpreter, but I can’t understand what he says. Apparently he thinks he’s passing

an examination in telling the time of day. Now is the chance of your life to be a heroine. You learned quite a lot of Norwegian, didn't you, from those children you were playing with in Bergen?"

He removed his hand from the child's mouth and regarded her with an eagerness that was not all whimsical.

"Sure I learned an awful lot. I can say 'eighty-eight small potatoes roll down the stairs' and that's a regular stumper to say in Norwegian. Like our 'Theophilus-Thistle,—the thistle-sifter,' you know, 'sifted-a-sieve-full-of-unsifted-thist——' "

In spite of himself, and of the gesture of uncontrolled impatience of the young lady, the anxious young man laughed out loud at this; but he interrupted the flow of the child's headlong speech by a sharp command in a voice so daunting that a moment's silence hung after his words. "Mary, be still. Now listen to what the landlord has to say—and understand him."

Pollie glittered a beady eye of bird-like attention upon the Norwegian, who heaved a sigh and began

once more, "I have sent for some one who speaks English." Pollie nodded her head triumphantly. "Why, I understand every word. It's something about somebody speaking English." The proprietor went on hopelessly, "She comes in three hours—thre-e-e hours."

"Three something or other," explained the little girl lucidly.

"At six o'clock—si-i-ix o'clock."

Pollie clapped her hands. "Easy!" she cried. "Somebody who speaks English will be here in three hours, and that'll be at six o'clock."

Kaptejn Rivedal mopped his forehead in incredulous relief. Was it possible that one of these foreigners could understand a plain statement?

The interpreter flung herself upon the young man in clamorous triumph. "*Now* aren't you sorry you thundered at me so? Hooray! It's all fixed! Aunt Nancy will be cured in no time and we can go on. Look a-here! I'll beat you and Caroline upstairs to tell Aunt Nancy how smart I am." She dashed impatiently up the steep stairs. As Harry held open



the door for his companion to pass into the sick room he murmured some apology about speaking sharply to the child. "You're quite right," she returned. "She's fearfully spoiled—and you're the only one who has any real control over her."

"What's that?" came sharply from the monumental bed,—“Harry setting up to be a Pollie-Tamer? The impertinence! I'm the only original small-girl-queller. What's this Pollie's telling me, about an interpreter?" They told their news eagerly and impetuously with none of the hush of talk to an invalid. Indeed, the face which was turned to them from the mountain of feathers did not look like that of a sick woman, although the snowy hair piled high over the piercing blue eyes was scarcely whiter than the lips which smiled bravely at the account of the conversation. She congratulated them in a steady voice, even in a cheerful one, though a sudden stab of pain wrung an involuntary cry from her a moment later. Pollie echoed the cry with spontaneous sympathy. "Oh, *poor* Aunt Nancy, is it as bad as that?"

The sick woman smiled again, though her eyes were dim with suffering. "My kingdom for a porous plaster," she said with a quaintly humorous intonation, "But I suppose I might as well wish for a ticket to Heaven."

"I should think so indeed!" cried Pollie's older sister scornfully. "You never saw such a forlorn little huddle of sod-roof huts as we've dropped into. Such looking barbarians! And not a soul in town who speaks English—or German or any civilised language."

Aunt Nancy closed her eyes and caught her lip in her teeth to repress a groan, but her voice had still its bantering note as she said gravely, "How many New England villages do you suppose a Norwegian could enter and find somebody who spoke his language or German?"

Caroline started a moment. "Oh, well, that's quite a different matter!" she cried seriously.

"On the contrary, my dear, I think it would be quite the same as here."

Caroline opened her lips to argue the case, but the

young man interposed laughingly, "Oh, do let Aunt Nancy, now she's sick, indulge herself to the top of her bent in her favourite occupation of defending people that are criticised. Did they bring you the hot-water bottles, *carissima tia*?"

The sufferer nodded. "I'm packed in them from head to foot. What with them and this mountain of feathers over me and the fire in the room I feel as though I were in Timbuctoo and not in Norway: and though there's no ticket to *Heaven* available, it feels——" Without a break in her voice she went on, "And now tell me some more about this interpreter. Is it man, woman, or child?"

Pollie burst out in a long-restrained flood, "Good gracious, Aunt Nancy-O, you must think we're Norwegians born and bred. Harry couldn't make out a thing, and it was all I could do to understand that it was somebody who's coming at six o'clock."

From the bed came an apparently innocent remark which was like a stone thrown into a pool of mirth, making the anxious faces of the young people

break into lines of helpless laughter. The old lady had looked at them seriously and said, "Ah, *I* wasn't even there, but I know who will come. It will be an old woman who has lived eighteen years in 'Meeneesohta.' "

Harry exclaimed as he laughed, "Aunt Nancy! How can you, when you're suffering so! I believe you'd joke on your deathbed."

The invalid lay back on her pillows and addressed the ceiling faintly. "That's no joke. That's the tragic truth. Every single old crone who has been proposed to us so far as a fluent English conversationalist has claimed to have inhabited Meeneesohta for eighteen years. Why not this one? I only pray she'll know more than the last one, who told my laundress I wanted starch in my stockings and none in my collars. I feel a little hesitancy about taking medicine prescribed in that hit-or-miss way!"

Her nephew dropped into a chair with a gesture of impatience. "It drives me mad to think I'm so helpless and can do absolutely nothing for you. I don't believe there's another country in Europe

where I could be so entirely blocked by ignorance of the language. I know even a little Russian."

"Don't brag of your——" came in a muffled tone from the bed.

"Heavens, Auntie! There's no brag left in me after that nightmare of a conversation downstairs. I'm going to learn their beastly lingo before——"

"'Beastly lingo' is not United States, my Harry. I don't mind, but your anxiety to be a perfect Yankee leads me, out of the kindness of my heart, to try——"

"You're not at the point of death at least, if you can still tease, you Spanish Inquisitor. I amend—I'm going to learn their language, or know the reason why. I don't see what I've been up to anyhow, these three weeks, that I haven't picked up anything."

"You and Caroline have talked too much English together," said the invalid in an entirely colourless tone, which nevertheless raised a red flag of self-consciousness upon the young lady's face. She rose from her chair with a start, and going over to the

window looked out into the grey veil of rain. The other went on, showing suddenly a face serious with real concern, "Well, from the way I'm feeling now I think you'll have plenty of time to learn all the Norwegian you want right here, in Naesvangen. I'm very much afraid, my dears, that I have one of my lengthy attacks. Those last ten miles down the mountain in the rain were about as bad for a rheumatic old lady as could well be imagined."

She paused, waiting apparently for some word of reassurance from Caroline, who continued to gaze stubbornly out of the window. The sick woman went on in a tone of almost humble apology which sounded oddly from her, whose imperious old face was moulded as from a life-long habit of command of herself and others.

"I can't tell you, Caroline, how sorry I am to upset your plans so. I'm a tiresome old woman, I know, and a chaperon who's more bother than she is worth, but I am really afraid this means two or three weeks before I can move—and not even then if I can't get some plasters. Whatever possessed

me to come off without them, I don't know. I have my salicylate and I thought that would be enough. I haven't had an attack like this in years." She stopped and there was silence. She turned her head and addressed herself directly to the young lady's silent back. "I'm *very* sorry, Caroline," she said, with a note of emotion in her voice.

Pollie sprang to the bedside and kissed the white face with extravagant and discomfiting affection. "Why, you poor dear Aunt Nancy-O! The idea of your thinking of us and our foolish plans when you have a red-hot coal in your hip. It's only what we deserve for making you come this way."

"It's not a red-hot coal, Pollie dear, but a white-hot wire. Heaven send you never feel the difference." She put the little girl on one side and again addressed herself resolutely to the silent figure by the window. "I'm afraid it will be very dull for you, Caroline, with nobody but Harry to talk to." There was the faintest hint of an inner significance in this speech, which was quite absent as she went on, "We'll have to telegraph the Everetts that we can't

meet them. They must go on without us. Oh, but we can't telegraph, can we, from this forsaken hole. Do they have even mails, I wonder?"

Caroline turned from the window and pressed her lips lightly on her old friend's forehead. "Don't worry about us, dear," she said heartily. "We'll get on very well—if only you can be made more comfortable. The Everetts will just have to wait until we can get word to them somehow." Her manner of affectionate solicitude was perfect, and the young man looked at her admiringly.

"Two weeks—three weeks—why, I could learn forty languages in that time!" cried Pollie, reverting to the original proposition. "Come on, Harry, let's learn it together. Only how are we going to do it without any grammar, or dictionary, or teacher or anything?"

"Seriously, Harry," said the sick woman, "I should really think it a good idea for you to learn some Norwegian—with all those Western lands of yours. There must be a lot of Norwegian settlers there. You see, I'm still hoping against



hope that you'll pay some attention to that part of your property."

The remark had a galvanic effect. Harry frowned painfully as if at a flick on a sore spot, and cried out: "Aunt Elizabeth Fox! How can you taunt me with neglecting what I—— You know what my mother feels about—— You know it is not my fault—why, what am I now doing but——" He glanced at Caroline, shifted his position, and went on in an even tone: "Yes, there are millions of Scandinavians out there. More than there are in the whole of Norway, I do believe. When I was out there—two years ago, you know—I was amazed to find how many. The whole country is full of their sod huts and their little settlements."

"Are they the handsome, intelligent race we see here?" asked his aunt.

"No, I can't say they are—but I think whatever seems common or brutalised in them comes from their superhuman efforts to adapt themselves to wholly different conditions, from the fact that they're struggling through a period of transition—

but they have good stuff in them. They are men! They need a little help—much help—to bring out the best in them, but by Jove! they have the making of a noble people! Though that country would make men out of dogs! My faith! That's America! And it's no more like the America you poor people know! It's the America one dreams of. That glorious sunshine and tonic air of the prairies—and the bigness of it—the room in it——”

He fell into a brooding silence, broken by his aunt's voice, in a tender, reminiscent murmur. “Your father lives in you again when you speak with that accent. When he first came back to New England after his year's exploration of the prairies—he was another man. He used to say he was like a man released from prison and mad with joy. How he always loved it—even after his marriage and when he——” She caught herself abruptly and stopped, as though before an indiscretion.

Her nephew went on with a dry smile, “I know—I remember how he felt about it. One of the few recollections of him I have is one day when he sat in

the garden of our villa on Lake Como and talked about the prairies. I remember how his voice rang and how his eyes shone—and how big and strong and hero-like he looked to his little boy. Sometimes I think I've inherited some of that passion. Mountain country like this seems beautiful to me—yes, of course—but like something to look at, not to live with. I think I never was so happy as that year I spent on the ranch. Good Heavens! that wide pure sky——” He rose impetuously and took a long stride across the room. When he turned he was smiling a little at his own fervour. “And yet—*de gustibus!* Do you know, so many kinds of people does it take to make a world, that many of the Norwegian settlers go mad with homesickness for these imprisoning mountains and their narrow grey skies. I remember talking with an old grey Norse farmer there and being so horror-struck at his loathing for the country. He had come to feel an absolutely sick hatred for the sunshine. ‘It seems the sun has a grudge on me—on me from the black valley of Gudvangen. Always glaring on me, on my house,

burning up my heart, killing my wife with dryness, always staring, staring, staring—I feel as though even in my grave I can't hide from it—and the wind, never still—always tearing along past me; how can one rest'——”

Caroline broke her silence with an effort, and joined in the conversation. “It is horribly irritating—that Western wind! You can't blame him. When we stopped off on our way to the Yellowstone to visit some business friends of father's at their ranch, I was nearly distracted with that steady, nerve-racking gale.”

The young man kindled at this criticism. “You weren't there long enough to get the rush of it into your blood. It's glorious. It sweeps over hundreds of miles of bare, clean, sun-soaked country, and it blows the very breath of life into your lungs. I never knew myself till after I'd been there—after I had grown to that scale. A man can think there—big thoughts and true; and live, a big, true life! It's as finely impersonal as the Sahara but not hostile—not even alien. It's where we belong——” He

was striding about the room as he delivered this speech, and passing by the bed was arrested by his aunt's burning eyes. He knew the look and stopped short. "Am I so much like him as that, Aunt Nancy?" he asked gently. She nodded her head. "Few men have been so loved as I loved my brother," she said, and her voice broke on the last word. Harry bent over her, and kissed her.

"Few women are so loved as his son loves you," he said in a low tone, but with a curious un-English fluency in making a tender speech.

His aunt smiled faintly and made no reply. There was a long silence in the low-ceilinged, wide-beamed room, filled with the steady voice of the rain. The child had slipped away, bent on her own devices; the young man stood by the window, looking dreamily out into the rain-blurred valley; and the girl sat with graceful erectness on the sofa, her eyes bent on him with a strange, absent expression in her face usually so keen with attentive intelligence.

The sick woman lay with closed eyes, her fine old face a mask of resolute endurance. A maid coming

in to replenish the fire was startled to find the room so still. After her clattering exit they all drew a long breath and looked about them at each other with something of the softened feeling of a renewal of common life that comes to one wakening from sleep. The invalid spoke first, piercing her nephew with shrewd, affectionate eyes. "It's the way of the world," she commented: "Them as has it don't want it and them as wants it can't have it! People on the plains frantic to get away, and you, brought up in French and German schools, fitted with your mother's most anxious care for a successful life abroad, with all her diplomatic acquaintance back of you——"

"Oh, abroad!" cried the young man, with a vehement impatience. "I'm sick of Europe! I'm sick of belonging nowhere. I want to strike root."

They were all so recently emerged from the penetrating sincerity of self-communion that their words were weighty with self-revealing significance.

The girl spoke with a surface manner of offering carelessly a reasonable suggestion to a restless child,

but her voice was vibrant with feeling. "Well, why don't you strike root in New York? Your mother is willing to compromise on that."

The young man looked at her long in a reflective silence. He seemed to be turning her remark over in his mind and evoking from it a vision in which she was a part. The sick woman raised her head to see him more clearly. Finally he smiled at the girl, a rare, flashing smile. When he spoke, although his words were neutral, there was an intimate quality in his tone which made her drop her eyes suddenly and the old woman catch her breath.

"Perhaps I will, *cara* Carolina," he said. "Who knows! Perhaps I will."

## II

### **An Interlude**

**B**Y six o'clock the Americans had reached a stage of impatience which moved even Kaptejn Rivedal from his slow tranquillity, inasmuch as his messenger had not returned. Seven o'clock came, and he had had a stormy, unintelligible interview with the man of the party, and by half-past seven he was almost uneasy. All the dwellers in the little cluster of houses about the hotel knew of his plight, and there was a general outcry of interest when two people were seen coming down the road from the valley. Herr Rivedal went himself to meet the newcomers, but returned with an expression of bitter disappointment. With both this and apprehension of an unpleasant scene on his face, he entered the sitting-room where his three younger guests were assembled, and from which he could see the invalid,



as she lay in his best bed. He held by the shoulder so strange a little figure that Pollie was frightened and retreated into the next room. They divined by some instinct that it was a boy of fourteen or fifteen who stood looking at them with bold, malevolent eyes, but the deeply lined face might have been that of a man of forty, and the grotesqueness of the shrunken body gave no clue as to the age of the landlord's prisoner. Herr Rivedal held him with a tight clutch on both shoulders, and issued a series of commands in his most strenuous Norwegian. He stopped long enough to present his uncomely companion to his guests—"Ingolf," he said, shoving him forward—"Ingolf Larsen."

Ingolf heeded in no way the storm of commands which fell upon him after this introduction. He stared about him, blinking, with perfect self-possession, and did not open his lips. Herr Rivedal lost patience and began shaking him violently—an easy thing to do with so limp a rag of humanity. Ingolf grinned with maddening consciousness of his own power to irritate, and endured his shaking with the

utmost calm. The Americans looked on at this scene in an astonishment so great and with an ignorance of its meaning so profound, that they made no attempt to interfere.

Finally Herr Rivedal struck his prisoner a succession of sharp blows, first on side of his face and then on the other. There was a cry from the other room at this, and Pollie came rushing in with flushed cheeks and flaming eyes. "Stop that!" she cried, "you shan't hurt him so. I don't know what's the matter, but he's littler than you and a cripple—stop! stop!" She caught hold of his arm and held it fast. There was a moment's silence while Ingolf looked at the elfish little girl. Then there came from his lips with the surprising effect of a talking automaton this sentence: "She has gone to the *saeter*. She will be here to-morrow." They all started. They could not have been more amazed if a dog had suddenly spoken. Kaptejn Rivedal sighed in exhausted relief and nodded. Pollie's nimble little brain was again the first to interpret. "He means the woman who was to talk English for us has gone

further away—what's a *saeter*?—and can't be here till to-morrow."

"I know what a *saeter* is," said Caroline. "I remember reading about them in the introduction to a translation of some Norwegian play we studied in college. It's a hut high on the mountain where they drive their cows and sheep in the two summer months so as to use the pasture land up there. The old women of the family are sent up to milk the cows and make butter and cheese. Of course it would take a long time to get a messenger up there and the woman back."

They heard a call from the next room,

"What a privilege it is to be chaperoning a college graduate!"

The voice was indomitably humorous, although it went on, "Well, young people, what *are* we going to do? Till to-morrow seems about as long as till doomsday to me to wait without doing a thing. Harry, can't you think of something?"

The young man groaned. "Aunt Nancy, I never was so tied, hand and foot, in my life. Of course

the first thing to do is to get a doctor, and the nearest approach to porous plasters Norway affords, but so far as I know Bergen is the nearest civilised place, and that's two days and a half from here, as we very well know. I might set out for there—I can't make any one understand enough to send a messenger—but when the interpreter comes, suppose she says there is a village with an apothecary shop only half a day from here, and a doctor around the corner. I would have left you alone for nothing. I feel so helplessly blocked at every turn. I can't even breathe, till I find some one who can speak a civilised language."

Caroline pointed to the dwarf, who stood impassive after the triumphant delivery of his message. "Why don't you try getting something out of that dreadful little creature? If he can say that much he must know more."

But Ingolf was proof against threats and persuasions, against bribes and promises. After trying every means possible they gave up. He evidently did not understand a word of what they said, so

utterly blank was the face he turned to their despairing attempts to cajole him. "He must have been taught just a few words, like a parrot," conjectured the invalid.

Kaptejn Rivedal, however, was evidently entirely satisfied with Ingolf's services, for he marshalled him out of the room with immense relief on his ruddy face. At the door Ingolf stopped and looked at Pollie again. Through all the ugly malice of his face and the repellent distortion of his body there pierced a sudden pathos, which appealed to the child. She ran over to him and held out her hand. "Thank you, Ingolf, for telling us," she said seriously. The dwarf did not take her hand, but he again broke his perverse silence: "The *saeter* is up on the mountain across the valley. She will be here to-morrow. She can speak for you. She has lived eighteen years in Kansas." With this parting shot he gave them all around his impudent stare, stuck out his tongue at Kaptejn Rivedal, and departed.

Harry breathed hard. "I wish the time of thumb-

screws would return. I'd make that little devil speak!"

They were startled by a curious sound from the next room. Miss Fox was laughing the hysterical laughter of one in pain, who is nevertheless overcome with amusement. "What did I tell you!" she said. "Eighteen years in Kansas she has lived. That is a formula in Norway. Every old woman must have done that or she can't qualify for interpreter——" She stopped with a groan which drove Harry beside himself with anxiety. "Aunt Nancy, this is horrible—your suffering so. I'll go out and find a doctor if I have to murder the town to do it!"

Miss Fox exclaimed with the impatience of pain, "I don't want a doctor. I want a porous plaster—or a dozen of them rather. I know what to do for myself—if I had the wherewithal. I haven't had sciatica all my life for nothing. Give me hot-water bags, salicylate, porous plasters, and time to lie in bed, and I can beat any attack."

She looked up at her nephew, made a gesture of

annoyed and stoical deprecation of the distressed sympathy which clouded his mobile face, and spoke with a dignity of self-control in her pain which rebuked his excess of feeling. "Come, come, Harry, don't worry about me so. Rheumatism never killed anybody yet, and what's the use of being a New Englander if one can't stand pain?—only I'll tell you one thing—I'm going to take some morphine to-night. If I don't sleep a little there'd be no living with me to-morrow. Hand me the medicine case and a glass of water, Caroline, and then go downstairs and get your dinner, or supper, or whatever the meal is here. When you come back you won't know me—the morphine will have made me so amiable."

She drove them out of the room with a lively tongue, whose brisk animation was contradicted by the quivering of her white lips.

As they sat at the table, covered with curious dried and smoked fish and remarkable cheeses of all sorts, they fell to talking in their usual admiring way of the invalid.

"She is wonderful," said her nephew—"absolutely wonderful to me. She has conquered herself more than any one else I ever knew. I never can express what she has been to me. I'm just coming to realise what an effort she has made in spending so much time abroad so as to be near her brother's son,—she's my spiritual mother——" He broke off suddenly, with a slight flush, and then, as though fearing to be disloyal, he went on, "No, I shouldn't say that, since I have, of course, my own mother—perhaps you might call Aunt Nancy my spiritual father. I remember my own father so slightly. They are said to be much alike—and Aunt Nancy is, in some way, more like a man than a woman—so fearless, so strong—so honourable."

Caroline broke in eagerly—"It's so easy to see by little things you let fall, how short a time, after all, you have lived in America."

"How so?" asked her companion with the petulant uneasiness which any reference to his cosmopolitan training always evoked in him.

"Why, that is the way all American women wish



to be—fearless, strong, and honourable. The old joke about women's having no sense of honour 'doesn't hold good any more with us. An American girl—a real one, you know—one of my friends, for instance, would no more tell a lie or act one than you would.”

“That is fine!” exclaimed Harry, looking at her with admiration. “That Frenchman was right who said a new type of womanhood had been evolved in the new world—but even so, Aunt Nancy is remarkable.”

“That she is!” said the other. “She’s always been a great power in our household, too. My earliest recollection is of the excitement attending Aunt Nancy’s frequent comings and goings from our house to Europe. She and father were friends for years before father’s marriage—like brother and sister. I never can realise that she is not my own aunt, and sometimes like a mother even. Mother is so much younger than father she seems like an older sister—only sometimes I really feel older than she—she’s so pretty and little, you know.”

"Isn't mamma a *dear* little thing?" cried Pollie with a comical, indulgent air.

Harry laid down his fork and laughed aloud. "What a way to speak of your mother, Pollykin," he said. "One could tell you were a little American."

"And why not couldn't you tell?" returned the child defiantly.

The maid arrived, bearing a platter of steaming fish. "For a change!" remarked Pollie, taking great pride in her gift for sarcasm. "We haven't had any fish since we came to Norway. Oh, no!"

"There's one thing comforting about our singular position here, Caroline," said Harry. "You don't need to be worried about Pollie's indiscreet remarks. You can be quite sure nobody will understand them. I can even venture to be indiscreet myself and say the maid who waits on the table would be very handsome if she had a less bovine expression. What a gay costume! Why don't you get one for fancy dress?"

"I'll do that," said the young lady.

With the unconscious and innocent insolence of tourists they stared at the strange and fantastic garb of the embarrassed serving girl. The bold mingling of white, scarlet, and black lightened the dreary colourlessness of the room. The flaming bodice and belt, the peacock-like iridescence of the beaded stomacher, the dazzling white and curiously wrought linen of the under-bodice, glowed with the elemental warmth of primitive paintings. The linen collar was of embroidery and turned back from a strong, round neck as white as milk. "She is handsome!" acquiesced Caroline heartily, "but have you noticed what singularly regular features all the women have here? I don't know why they are not beautiful,—so many of them have faces that look like statues."

"That is just the trouble. They have all the heaviness of stone. And, after all, beauty—just simple, heavy, solid beauty—is out of style—like goodness. We moderns are too complicated to enjoy it. What moves us is something infinitely finer." As he spoke he looked at his vis-à-vis with so harmlessly and daringly pointed a gaze that she

laughed, a little confused, and dropped her eyes. The young man continued to look at her, noting with an intelligent and appreciative eye the many details whose perfection made up the quality he found so admirable. He approved of the way her glossy brown hair was tossed high in a light roll over her square forehead. He liked the exquisite cleanliness of her white collar and starched waist, and did not find unpleasing the slight effect of boyish severity in the plain, perfectly tied bow at her throat. He liked her long, slim, carefully manicured hands, and he admired the taste which left the fingers ringless on this rough journey. The delicate, irregular features, the boldly defined modelling of her jaw, her firm lips, and the clear brown of her skin appealed to him as in reality a refinement on the old ideals of obvious and unmistakable beauty. "No wonder she is considered one of the handsomest girls in New York. Aunt Nancy said her good looks made up for her father's lack of money. No wonder that Englishman in Oxford lost his head over her,"

As if reading his thoughts, Pollie broke the silence by saying meditatively, "I wish I could see that dear Mr. Campbell. I just loved him!"

"Did your sister?" asked Harry with a grave malice, not looking at Caroline. He had really been curious to know how far the desperately enamoured man had gone.

"No, she didn't," said Pollie. "It was awful the way she treated him, when he was so good to us. I liked him better than any of sister's men—except you, of course."

Sister looked embarrassed at this, but Harry's laugh was as entirely unconstrained as usual. The *enfant terrible* went on with great pride in her sister's accomplishments: "Sister can treat people the worst, anyhow—and without ever saying a word. She can just sit still and look, till you feel as though you wanted to go through the floor. She can say nothing at all the most crushing of anybody I ever saw." Caroline flushed at this characterisation and proposed that they go back upstairs and settle Miss Fox for the night.

As she had prophesied, the invalid's face wore a distinctly calmer expression. "Oh, heavenly friend that morphine is, my children," she smiled from the pillows: "I feel as though I could wait indefinitely the arrival of our procrastinating interpreter. It's really almost worth suffering to know the incredible relief when it stops. I am the most fortunate creature in the world,—the red-hot wire in my sciatic nerve is temporarily out of business. I don't envy anybody—not you, your good looks and youth, Caroline; not you, your mountain of money and independence, Harry. I begin to feel drowsy—thanks be! I wouldn't change places with the Pope."

"Well, I don't feel drowsy at all," said Harry. "I think I'll take an easy chair out in front of the hotel and sit the night out. It has stopped raining for a wonder."

His aunt made no comment on this fantastic notion, nor did Caroline in words, but her raised eyebrows of whimsical interrogation seemed about to bring from him an answer of impulsive openness.

He checked himself, however, with an abruptness rare in his conversational movements and gave a trivial reason. "I always wanted to see a night that didn't get dark. Then too, I may possibly get hold of our old Kansas woman a few moments sooner that way, by being on hand the first thing in the morning."

Pollie clamoured to be allowed to stay up with him. "Such foolishness is only for grown-ups," Harry assured her. "Besides, I'm going to improve my mind. While I was raging around downstairs, trying to find an English dictionary, I came across this old volume"—he drew a tattered and coverless book from his pocket. "It's some sort of a Norse saga,—an old English translation,—and I'm going to put myself in the mood of the country by reading it. When in Rome, you know—when in Paris be *sage*: when in Norway be *saga*." His aunt groaned at the atrocity of this attempt at a pun, and said: "I should think your father were here. That sort of dreadfulness used to be just his specialty. How can you perpe-

trate it, when you are more at home in French than——”

Harry interrupted her with an odd, disproportionate annoyance in his voice—“Oh, for Heaven’s sake, Aunt Nancy, let up on my foreign training. Artybody would think I spoke English with an accent——”

“Whereas, as a matter of fact,” continued his aunt with a whimsical inexorability, “you are so excessively and consistently American in your idioms and accent as exactly to arouse suspicion of your genuineness. It is only foreigners who don’t dare to take liberties with the language. It’s a kind of coquetry with you never to use an expression that is not American. We sure-enough Yankees aren’t so careful.”

“Oh, how *mean*, Aunt Nancy!” cried Pollie, with a misunderstanding but loyal resentment for Harry’s injured expression. “Harry’s all right—now don’t you tease him!” As she spoke she sprang protectingly to his side, lost her balance and fell, bringing down a chair with a wild clatter on the bare pine



floor. The back struck so sharply across Harry's outstretched hand that he gave an exclamation of pain and the blood flowed from a cut knuckle.

"How like Pollie!" commented her sister. "There is nothing so disastrous in the world as Pollie's trying to be helpful."

The little girl was horrified at the accident, and in spite of Harry's kindly consolations, and his attempt to make light of the hurt, she was much subdued, and went off to bed with Caroline, hanging her head guiltily.

Harry sat down for a few last words with his aunt, who lay already half stupefied by the sedative. She roused herself, however, and fixed her penetrating blue eyes meaningly on his dark ones. They were used to much wordless intercourse—this pair who had lived and thought so like one as almost to have a medium for communication other than speech. Their real talk was the silence between the words and their alert consciousness of significance in the intonation of insignificant words.

"I hope you won't be too much bored with this

unexpected change in plans, Harry," she said. "You must try and keep Caroline from feeling the disappointment of missing the Everetts. You'll have an opportunity to see a good deal of Caroline," she continued in perhaps slightly too carefully careless an addition; "much more than in England. She was so admired there, it was hard to catch a glimpse of her."

"I'm not surprised she should be admired," said Harry. "She is really a perfect example of an admirable modern type. It appeals to me very strongly in my longing for things American which you call so sentimental." He was more successful than his aunt in keeping any shade of consciousness out of his voice, and she recognised with a generous appreciation his superiority in the game they were playing.

She felt that, after all, in picking his way through a hazy atmosphere of uncertainties Harry was far more flexibly skilful than she, and with a change of tactics as instant as dexterous she set out upon another path, more direct. "That is exactly what

your mother has so often said about her. She and your mother are great friends, you know."

"That speaks well for the completeness of her charm. Any one who can stand my mother's piercing ability to discover defects——"

"*Exactly!* Quite so!" agreed his aunt in the New England vernacular she so willingly used in her incessant journeyings away from her old home.

"That Mr. Campbell was very much taken with her," went on Harry. His intonation was one of indifferent affirmation, but so palpable a question was in the following silence that his aunt answered quite openly. "No, there wasn't anything between them. Caroline wouldn't look at him because he had no sense of humour. All his money didn't make a bit of difference. She's singularly disinterested and upright,—Caroline,—quite like a man."

Harry meditated for a space on the conversation at table, and his aunt continued, "I hope she will make a rich marriage, however. It would please her father so—I am very fond of her father, you know. I would like very much to please him."

Harry looked at her; a long, significant, smiling look, in which many things were expressed. Then he rose, kissed her good-night affectionately, and drew down her curtains. He stood for a moment silent by the bed, holding her hand in his and then, "I began to tell both you and Caroline the real reason for my sudden fancy for an all-night vigil, but somehow Caroline, for all she is so intelligent—well, it occurred to me that she might think me self-conscious and theatrical to be so aware of the advance upon me of a mood. I feel as though I were going to have a great reckoning with myself to-night and decide a lot of things. It's quite time I did, and a long white night is a good season."

He tried to withdraw his hand and turn away, but his aunt held him, looking at him in a questioning silence. He smiled reassuringly and added: "Don't worry about my being bored here, dear aunt. Caroline's the best of companions. I'm sure we shall get on famously."

At the mention of the girl's name the other's eyes sharpened into a still more piercing interrogation.

He laughed outright at her insistence and said as he left the room, "And as for her not understanding transcendental moods and fancies, and being perhaps a bit hard, why, there is, of course, no other woman but yourself who does understand impractical dreams. Besides, the quality is quite one thing to prize in her—for me at least who am too much swayed by moods."

Although nothing could have been more lightly and impersonally neutral than the tone of this little speech, Miss Fox fell asleep with a pleased smile on her noble, tired old face.

### III

#### A White Night

**I**T was ten o'clock of a clear night when Henry Fox found himself alone on the platform of hard-beaten earth before the door of the rude little building which called itself the hotel; but there was no suggestion even of twilight in the transparent atmosphere. The valley lay bathed in a clear light where was no radiance of the sun, but he noticed that one golden beam still rested on the crest of the mountain opposite him. It was not the rosy glimmering of after-glow in the Alps; it lit up the cragged peak, the patches of snow, and one spot of brilliant green, with a yellow light of actual sunshine. The young man looked up at it and reflected that the green he saw was probably the upland pasture, the *saeter*, from which their interpreter was to come. He measured with his eye the great height of the frowning wall of rock which bore the little

meadow up into the last sunlight, and shook his head apprehensively as he thought of the length of time necessary to get an old woman down from so dizzy an eyrie.

The sun sank with strange swiftness, its departure marked by the rushing, upward advance of the shadow from the valley. The yellow light retreated from the circle of green it had made so lustrous, across the snow-fields above and then up the great sloping peak of grey rock like a lofty watch-tower on the mountain wall, which stretched its prodigious height and length along the valley. For a long moment it crowned this point with refulgence and the watcher below gazed at the light with involuntary fascination. When it finally slid from the grey peak and lost itself in the sky, he drew a long breath, as though something had depended on his seeing the last of that day.

He sat down, fumbling in his pocket for the old book he had brought out from the hotel, and looking absently about him. The irregular cluster of tiny log-houses, weather-beaten to an indistinguish-

able grey, was very quiet. There was not a sound from any side. The minute windows stared irresponsive and blank into the clear, colourless light of the evening, like eyes wakeful but dreamily fixed on a distant object. Not a breath of wind was abroad. The tall grasses on the sod-roofs stood as slenderly motionless as so many wires. However, in spite of the unearthly quiet of the air, there was no suggestion to the young American of the stifling quality which he associated with a breathless night. A vital freshness made his blood tingle even in the magic hush where the rustling of the pages of the old book sounded loud.

He began to read at random. "In the long winter nights she waited for him, and in the longer summer days she waited, but he came not back again. In a far country he had drunk a magic potion, and it was as though he had never known her. She could have stood before him, her hair as golden as the light of day, her eyes as blue as the sky in July during the small hours before the sun comes over the mountain, her broad brow as white



as the snow on the peaks and her cheeks as rosy as the morning fog under the sun's kiss, and he would not have known her. It was as though he had never seen her, and so he stayed with dark women of the south, and so through all the long winter nights she waited and through all the long summer days——”

The young man turned back to the beginning, fancying that he recognised some version of the Brunhilda legend, after Sigurd had left her. Yes, the heroine's name was Brynhild, with all the Brunhilda traits, tall and strong and radiant and yet with the shadows of misfortune heavy upon her. He laid down the book and tried to remember something he had heard one of his professors in Paris say about the inner significance of the Norse mythology. A vividly recollected turn of phrase suddenly brought the very man before his eyes, the quick, sparkling, ugly little Frenchman he had so admired, and with that picture, all his student life in Paris—the old, grey Collège de France, the new, grey Sorbonne, and about them the grey and gay city, so hypnotic

in its unwavering sureness of being the centre of the world. He was surprised to find that the spell did not carry, that he felt no nostalgia, although the vision of the place he had loved so well came to his mind with an almost actual presence. He felt no impulse to go back. It was a lovely picture, but he was tired of looking at pictures. It seemed to him that he had been spending all his life walking about a huge museum, looking at pictures. He was no artist to go on doing that indefinitely, nor could he create pictures of his own. But he was a human being. The instinct to create something was hot upon him. He was a man, and strongly though confusedly a man's life called to him.

He had lived abroad most of his thirty years, yet he felt now and knew he would always feel an alien. He did not belong there, Europeans were not his own people. He thought of the many friends he had among them and recognised an impalpable but impassable barrier between them. To a remote, wilfully inaccessible nature like his mother's, this rarefied air of attenuated relationships was the only

decent one, but he found himself of late gasping and choking in it. He was the son of a plain man, and he was starving for plain and homely human fare. Even the strangely penetrating intimacy with his aunt had something of the thin and unsubstantial quality which seemed to lie like a blight on all his inner life. His chilling loneliness of spirit was brought home to him in no more forcible way than by an occasional realisation of how ignorant he was of this human being closer to him than all others. After all he felt that he knew nothing of the struggles and victories by which she had attained the inspiring pinnacle from which she viewed the world. She was a finished product, whose very perfection lay like a wall before his groping spiritual blindness.

As for his foreign friends, he felt suddenly how completely foreign to him they were. He realised the beauty—the superior beauty—of much in the life of the older world, but he longed with an instinctive yearning for his own. He thought of the charming and exquisitely finished French and Italian

women he had known, who had fascinated him at different times, and he had a sudden sick revulsion from the thousand pretty and subtle graces which hang like a heavy perfume over their actions. Every word, every look, is significant with meanings other than the apparent—it is a charm, a magic, a fragrant atmosphere: but suddenly he felt back of him the clean and bare traditions of a new world and he longed for the bright neutrality of simple conduct, for a certain scentless cleanliness of intercourse. All at once rich old laces exhaling sweetness with every stir of their heavy folds seemed of doubtful freshness, almost dingy: and he wished for clean and firmly woven white linen, with none of the strength of the texture impaired by the drawing of threads for decoration.

Caroline Morton came to his mind as an example of this contrasting type—as the example which had made him aware of his lack of harmony with his surroundings, which had stirred him from his drifting apathy. He recognised in her a hardness of outline and rigidity of strength which he was used

to hearing criticised in American women by his European friends; but it seemed to his soul, sick for realities, that he welcomed these qualities as a part of her blessed Americanism. It was like her figure—none of the rounded, undulating curves of the lovely, ineffectual bodies of the European women he had known, but straight and tall and firm. It was like her face—he knew what his French artist-comrades would say of her face, that it was not a woman's at all, with its clear, absolutely certain, well-defined, somewhat hard modelling, that it had little of the elusive charm of sex.

At this he cried out impatiently to himself that he was sick of women who were nothing but women. He longed for one who should be a human being also, a member of the same humanity with himself; no inexplicable, puzzling, fascinating enigma, but a creature with many of his own healthy impulses, made of like flesh and blood. It was time he found his mate. It was time he began to live his life. His thirty years of inactive contemplation seemed a shameful thing to his suddenly aroused conscious-

ness of the unused forces and strength of his manhood.

Seeing no worthy target he had never bent his bow, and now this seemed to him inexcusable sloth. Better to aim at any one of the prizes other men struggled for, and put all his power into the hunting, rather than wander with muscles forever lax and useless. Most forms of modern activity had seemed ugly and repellent to him, involving an open or concealed cruelty to others from which he shrank: but it was borne in on him of late, and this night most strangely, that even if it was cruel, even if it was ugly, it was at least action, it was life. Far better to forego an impossible ideal than to drift aimlessly through the years of his greatest strength. Evidently human life—real human life—was ugly and cruel. Well, he was human, he could live a life other men loved. He stirred restlessly in his chair and the old book dropped to the ground, the slight noise resounding in the profound silence about him. He picked it up and again tried to interest himself in the story of passionate and simple life and love.

“Together they rode about the valleys, each the other’s mate in strength, in courage and in force of life, and all folk cried—‘See, there go two children of the Sungod,’ and they lived wholly in each, he in her beauty and she in his wisdom, for they were both strong.”

He was startled. In the incredibly hushed silence it was almost as though a living voice had called to him from the yellow pages. That was the realisation of his half-formed elemental dream. Two thousand years ago, perhaps in this very valley, a man, a strong man as he felt himself able to be, had seen the same vision which lightning-like had flashed across his own eyes, and the vision had come true. Perhaps the spirits of those resolute and radiant lovers still rode together about this silent and portentous country, stirring men’s hearts to vital things.

A sudden faint and continuous murmur struck on his ear. He sat up, his heart beating fast at this invasion of the silence. In a moment he recognised the sound and sank back with a smile. It was the far-away roar of a mountain torrent, which his ears,

grown fine from the hush, had just been able to catch. It was the sound of rushing water which is never for a moment still in any corner of Norway.

It occurred to him that for Norwegians that must take the place of the incessant stirring wind of the prairies he had grown so to love in his year of Western life. He looked about him at the imposing scenery and tried to realise that it meant home to the people dwelling in the little huts.

It was beautiful, supremely beautiful—that he acknowledged to himself as he gazed at the peaceful, narrow valley, with its tiny strip of fertile land smiling up undaunted at the solemn, snow-capped giants who towered over it, silent in their forbidding and morose nobility. It was grander than Switzerland; his carefully trained sense of critical appreciation recognised that. Indeed one could not well imagine an earthly beauty which could be greater, but he felt again that it was a beauty foreign to him, infinitely remote from him, which could never become a part of his life. He admired it as one ad-



mires a supremely beautiful woman, a singer or actress, who cannot be conceived as being tender. It was the old story—he was always lost in a maze of objects at which he looked with an appreciative but remote eye. He had been doing that all his life.

No, for one year he had known what it was to be a part of the world about him, to have the beauty and glory of the universe reflected fervently in his own heart. A sudden sick longing came over him for the wide, illimitable plains, flooded with sun by day, and lying gloriously vacant under a million stars by night. He remembered the first night he had spent under those Western stars, and there surged into him a choking flood of the same feeling which had made the night an epoch in his life. He had not been able to sleep, so exalted a joy possessed him. He had lain, rapt in a blessed amazement, and gazed at the clear many-coloured golden eyes, feeling cumbersome, artificial mental habits fall from him, until it seemed that for the first time he knew what it was to live. And yet there had come into

his mind a paragraph written about a night spent under pine-trees, which echoed now in his heart. "Yet even while I was exulting in my solitude I became aware of a strange lack. I wished a companion to lie near me in the starlight, silent and not moving, but ever within touch. For there is a fellowship more quiet even than solitude and which, rightly understood, is solitude made perfect. And to live out of doors with the woman a man loves is of all lives the most complete and free."

That were a life for him! The simple, old, uncomplicated ideal was what his father's son was starving for. To spend his life on the prairies his father loved, to be brain and soul for the ignorant Norwegian settlers on his father's land, to ride over miles of virgin soil by day, and to sleep under the stars with the woman he loved. No Norse children of the Sungod, no strange and fair-haired Northern lovers, could cause him to envy them. He too would have lived his dream in the light of day.

Even as his breath came more quickly at the thought, he knew it for the idlest of dreams. Two

women stood in the way, and in them he saw personified the crazy impossibility of his vision,—Caroline Morton and his mother.

A shiver ran through him, and he realised that the air was grown penetratingly chill. He rose and went into the hotel for wraps, noticing that it was nearly midnight. As he settled himself again in the long chair before the door, he thought of the night he had waited all through, at a distant Western railway junction, for his mother, when she came to visit him, the year he was on his ranch. What a blind mistake that had been—that visit! To expect his mother, his exquisite, rose-tinted, white-haired mother to enjoy the plains! His father had been wiser than he in giving up wholly any idea of compromise between them. She had not stirred from the ranch-house—luckily a large and comfortable one—during the whole of her stay. When he had come from a long gallop over the unending gold-coloured grasses, into the discreetly shaded room where she sat with a fine indulgent patience for this passing phase of his, turning over the leaves of the

last French or Italian novel, he had felt singularly out of place in his own house. He recalled his boyish memories of his big, burly father and thought he must have felt the same abashed uncertainty in the presence of that perfect flower of civilisation which in some amazing way he had been able to make his wife. Indeed Mrs. Fox often remarked during that visit that Henry grew to look more and more like his father; "only you are a finer type," she had said with her delicately courageous and unsentimental adherence to truth.

To-night her son, remembering that, shook his head impatiently. No, he was not a finer type, he was of the same stuff as his father, and all that his mother's care had accomplished was to prevent his realising it sooner and to sap the strength for action which should have been his long ago. If it were not for his mother he would ask nothing better than to leave this improbably picturesque and beautiful country, to leave the whole world of veiled relationships and subtle, unreal distinctions, and disappear into the wide lands where he felt his father's spirit

still alive, borne about by the eternal and life-giving wind. But there was Caroline!

Although she had been standing as the embodiment of the new life possible to him, he could not place her in the apocalyptic vision of simple and elemental life which had come to him that night. He could not imagine Caroline "lying near him in the starlight." No, she was another phase of Americanism—the actual one that was really within his grasp—as much of his lofty ideal as would endure under an electric light. She pictured to him the only aspect of vital life which would bear incarnation in the twentieth century; the virile, throbbing life of the American cities. He felt again the curious vertiginous fascination of New York. It had appealed to him instantly with a force he had never felt elsewhere, in spite of his familiarity with Paris and London.

After all, that was the life for a modern. One could not be in harmony with his age if he tried to embody an ideal in other terms than those of his contemporaries. His starlit dream was a romantic

bit of fancy which could never be real to any one but himself—and not even to himself since he realised its impossibility. He could indeed, as Caroline had said, “take root in New York.” His ideal was to lose himself in some vital action. Well, where could he be more lost than in the feverish rush which meant life to all those grim, determined men of business? To struggle with them would be an exercise of every ounce of his strength, and a man could ask no more. It was not so picturesque a life as that of the Norse hero in the old book, but at bottom it was the same—fierce, relentless competition with his fellows, and a woman made of the same stern stuff to cheer him on. That was Caroline. There would be no flinching there. She would urge him ahead in the breathless race with the same indomitable severity with which she scourged her own flesh in whatever race she chose to run. There was cruelty in this passion to surpass, but cruelty was the law of nature—it was weak to shrink from it. His blood flowed more quickly at the thought of the harshness which lay as a founda-

tion at the bottom of American strength. At least it was real, and it seemed to be impossible to have vigour and valour without harshness. His horror of cruelty must be exaggerated and morbid—the result of his foreign education, far from the realities of modern life. He must overcome it, must force himself to take pleasure in a success which all other men and women found supremely desirable.

He picked up the book again to read of the bloodshed which so rejoiced the hearts of its terrible hero and heroine. It was the ancient expression of the same passion for supremacy which made moderns rejoice in the shedding of gold, nearer to their rivals' hearts than blood. He wanted to intoxicate himself with this thirst for power. But he found unexpectedly that, while he could still read, it was only by straining his eyes. He looked about him in surprise, as there had been no perceptible darkening of the air. Every object still stood forth to view, clear and distinct, but he now noticed, with an oddly nocturnal effect, the light subdued into neutral tones. When he had last noticed his surroundings it was

evening, and now it was unmistakable night, for all that no darkness hung in the air. His watch showed him one o'clock, and instinctively he glanced up to see the stars. The sky, although slightly overcast with a faint misty cloud, was singularly limpid. It had none of the velvety quality of more southern skies by night. It was clear and almost whitely transparent. "An odd, unnatural look for a night sky," he thought, "like all in this singular country;" and he composed himself to sleep.

His thoughts still went confusedly on, following the lines into which he had fallen during this curious period of self-reckoning, when what he had been vaguely feeling seemed, for the first time, to have focussed into articulate thought. Competition—that was the way of life; to strive mightily against your fellows, that would always be the way a man's strength was to be used. One must subscribe to the general law, with no sentimental shrinking from the consequences. And yet he fell into a drowsing reverie in which he half saw the possibility of a life where success meant not wresting from another



what he wished, not living on the ruin of other men's hearts' desires, but some happy, mystic victory over self alone, the attainment of a good whose possession meant the deprivation of no one else, the reaching of a bright goal to which all might come.

His misty and half-formed golden fancies disappeared like the dying away of a shower of stars, and he fell into sleep. When he awoke he looked at his watch with a start, thinking he must have slept long, so blue was the sky above him, and he was relieved to find it but half-past two. The colour of the sky was a revelation to him. There was as yet none of the hard brilliance of sunlight in it. It was as one imagines the skies of paradise to be—purged of all earthly colour and blue only through its unfathomable depths. He remembered the words of the saga, "her eyes as blue as the sky in July before the sun comes over the peaks," and understood.

As he dozed again the phrase brought back to him the rest of the description. He remembered that he had heard that there is nearly always a morning

mist in this moist western part of Norway. Evidently this day was an exception. He would like to see it; perhaps the saga-maker had been as acute in his observation of that as in his noting of the sky. The veils of sleep came dropping, and there crowded about him the figures of the old legend—great, brave creatures, of a simplicity in life and love and hate and death that made a modern sick with envy. Sigurd, his yellow mane hanging over his bronzed shoulders; Brunhilda, her heavy golden braids massed above her broad white brow, and her sad, brave, blue eyes . . . little by little they faded away into the darkness of profound sleep.

Through this, after apparently an eternity of unconsciousness, there pierced slowly as from a distance the feeling that some one was standing near him. He made a great effort to arouse himself, but so heavy on him lay the stupor of sleep that no outward effect came from this, save that he opened his eyes languidly. A white mist was about him, thick and clean, and pierced through and through with an incredibly radiant glow. Before him stood

a tall figure in a long dark mantle. Every other object the mist had blotted out save only this one.

It was impossible that he was awake. His dream was continuing before his open eyes. It was Brunhilda herself who stood looking about her with bright, sad eyes under a serene white brow. She was breathing quickly, as though from rapid exercise and all her face was suffused with a rosy radiance as from a light within. One of her heavy braids was loosened, and she was binding it up about her smooth golden head.

Although she had evidently seen him, since she stood directly before his chair, she was not at the moment looking at him, but gazed about her and up at the window of the hotel, as though searching for a sign of life. The young man felt a confused whirling in his head. He seemed to be in a trance where he had lost his power to move, could not even feel himself alive. Summoning all his energies he sat up suddenly, the book dropping again from his knee to the ground.

At the noise the woman before him turned and

looked at him. In the silence and isolation of the spot the meeting of their eyes was like an electrifying event. For a moment his wide, startled gaze held her transfixed, and they looked at each other in silence.

Then she said gravely, "Ah, you've wakened, have you? Well, here I am."

## IV

### Porous Plasters

THE words were perfectly commonplace and the tone in which they were spoken most natural and unconscious, but the young man felt thrilled by an inner significance almost symbolic. It was as though they came as an answer to his dream, as though they were some prophetic ending for his night of visions.

Only for a moment did this fantastic—and, as he instantly denoted it in his mind, sentimental and melodramatic—idea persist, for the newcomer was smiling at his confused and bewildered face. She went on with an unmistakable Western emphasis on her r's, "I must have scared you, coming up so when you were so dead asleep. I didn't mean to. I'm the person Rivedal sent for to talk English. I've just come from the *saeter* up there." She pointed up in the direction of the mountain opposite.

The gesture loosened her cloak, which fell open, disclosing the ordinary brilliant peasant costume. Harry suppressed an exclamation of involuntary, amazed admiration, such as one feels before a lovely antique statue, so noble a beauty was shown by the simple lines of the primitive dress.

He was still but half-awake. Although the woman who stood looking at him smilingly, as at a sleepy child, had spoken with the greatest clearness in an odd voice with a certain thick sweetness in it like unstrained honey, he had not understood any word. He continued staring at her, open-mouthed, with bewildered eyes. At this she broke into a laugh. "I must have waked you up out of a nightmare," she said, amused. "Don't be afraid. I'm not part of it. I'm real. I'm Gunhild Larsen, and I've come to interpret for you."

Harry's self-possession came back with a rush. Since he was a little boy, he could not remember having been so long without it. He rose to his feet and began speaking with his usual grace. "I'm sure I beg your pardon. I must have been very sound

asleep. I couldn't seem to realise I was awake. And yet I had stationed myself here expressly, so as to intercept our interpreter. But that's really one reason I was so startled. I expected a very different kind of person—we had it somehow fixed in our heads that it was an old—an old person—who was coming. I don't know how we got the idea unless that we've run across mostly old people returned from America, and then we heard too that you had lived so long in our West." He was running on aimlessly to give himself time to collect his thoughts, when his listener broke in with an agitated rush, her eyes wide with an incredulous delight. "Why! why!" she cried, her voice breaking, "you must be Americans, ain't you! They told me you were English."

"Yes," returned the man, "I am an American. Why?" The thrill with which he made this statement was also like a continuation of his night's emotion.

"Oh, *oh!* Oh, *my!*" cried the other. "Would you mind shaking hands with me? I'm an Amer-

ican myself! I was born in Kansas—and you're the first American I've seen in seven years—since I came back to Norway." The water gathered in her eyes, and she put out a large shapely hand, which the young man felt trembling in the instant it lay in his. "They said you needed somebody right away—an old lady sick, so I came all the way down from the *saeter* in the night, but if I'd known that you were Americans I'd have come twice as far. Oh, I do hope I can help you! What can I do?"

Harry felt that a plain statement of who he was and how they all came to be in Naesvangen would not only enlighten the extraordinary creature who stood before him, but would clear his own confused brain. He took firm hold of himself and began, "My name is Fox, Henry Fox, Junior, and it is my aunt, Miss Elizabeth Fox, of New York and Lenox, who is ill. She has been travelling for some months with two daughters of an old friend of hers—Miss Morton and her little sister. I joined the party in England and have been with them ever since. We have been in Norway about three weeks, with Eng-



lish friends at Bergen. Leaving there three days ago, we intended to ride over the mountains and arrive ultimately at Gudvangen, where we were to meet friends of Miss Morton's, but we were caught in a cold rain yesterday morning, which, together with the great fatigue attending a horseback trip for a woman of her years, brought on one of my aunt's severe attacks of sciatic rheumatism."

The girl interrupted him with an exclamation of pity. "*Oh*, the poor lady! and however in the world did you manage to get here, of all places?"

"Well, I don't speak any Norwegian, but somehow I managed to make the guides understand that they must take us to the nearest hotel. They brought us down here yesterday afternoon about two o'clock, and my aunt was able to go to bed, and with a fire in the room be made more comfortable, but I was perfectly helpless about doing anything for her because nobody speaks any English here."

"There *is* somebody who speaks English very well; she has lived eighteen years in Minnesota, but

she is very sick now and of course Rivedal couldn't get her, as he has once or twice before when English fishermen came through. Now here *I* am, though, and what can I do for you?"

"There really isn't much that can be done for my poor aunt. She is used to these terrible attacks and knows just how to handle them, but she needs very much a remedy she forgot to bring with her, the plasters they use so much for rheumatism. I thought if you could go with me to the nearest doctor I could see if he has anything of the sort—perhaps he might have *something* like them."

He was interrupted eagerly. "Porous plasters? Why, yes, we know all about them. So many people here have rheumatism, and they couldn't get along without porous plasters. No, there's no doctor anywhere near, but every house in the village has rheumatism remedies. Why, Rivedal must have a lot. He has rheumatism himself."

The young man's look of blank amazement changed to a wrathful indignation. "Do you mean to say that that old reprobate let my poor aunt suffer

all night and never had the common decency to offer——”

The girl cut him short with a blunt roughness. “How in the world could *he* know what was the matter with your aunt if you didn’t tell him? The messenger he sent up to the *saeter* told me they were afraid it was a contagious disease, but he took you into his own home without a question.”

Harry was thrown back into stupefied amazement. This sudden anti-climax to his helpless anxiety of the day before, this ludicrous key to his long bewilderment, this light farce-comedy end of his tragedy, petrified him with wonder. “Well, I’ll be damned!” he said impressively, and turned with apologetic gesture to the girl.

“Oh, *I* don’t mind!” she said cheerfully. “I’m so glad to hear anything that sounds American. My father was section boss on a railroad in Kansas, so I’m used to it. Besides that, I’m no fine lady. I work for my living and words don’t scare me. Come, let’s see if we can’t stir up somebody in the house.”

She turned and entered the hotel. "Rivedal! Rivedal!" she called, omitting the title after the fashion of plain Norwegian speech. The old sea-captain stuck his tousled white head out of a door down the hall. On his sleepy face there beamed the greatest relief as he recognised Gunhild. "Welcome, in God's name!" he called to her and in a moment he was standing, in slippers and dressing-gown, deep in unintelligible guttural conversation. The girl turned from him to the American with a sudden laugh. "It's a low-down shame to laugh or see anything funny in it, but honest I just can't help it. He says he keeps his porous plasters in the closet of the room where your aunt is. When you all came down on him so unexpected yesterday, he forgot to clear the things out from that closet—he almost never has any folks here, although he calls his home a hotel—and they are there yet—in the little closet over her bed."

Harry's stupefaction reached its climax. "Well, may I be everlastingly——" he began and broke off to join in the girl's sudden shout of laughter at the

expression on his face. "Don't it beat all!" she cried between gusts of glee.

Harry laughed as though he never could stop. There was something hysterical in his mirth, as though his nerves, strained by anxiety, by a night of wakefulness, and by unwonted emotion, were relaxing all at once into their normal tension. The landlord, enlightened as to the cause for merriment by Gunhild, joined his deep bass to the chorus. He too was relaxing in relief after confusion and anxious suspense.

To these three, making merry in the first sunlight, came Caroline, looking pale and a little severe after a bad night. "*What* can you find to——" she began in amazement without bounds.

Harry turned to her in laughing, eager explanation. "You know how absolutely crazy we were to have some rheumatism plasters for Aunt Nancy, yesterday—how I thought I'd have to go two days' journey to get some sort of a substitute? Well, it turns out they know all about them, here, and there

are a pile lying on the shelf in Aunt Nancy's room, the very room where she is now."

Caroline did not smile, and before her wondering seriousness the young man's laughter subsided guiltily. "I don't see anything so funny in *that*, I'm sure. I think it is pitiful that your poor Aunt Nancy suffered so without cause. I do hope she'll be relieved now."

Harry fell into an abashed sobriety. "It *doesn't* sound so funny now I tell it—but it seemed awfully funny at the time. I don't know—perhaps I was a little wrought up, and the reaction——"

"Why should you be wrought up?" asked Caroline with a chilling reasonableness. "You knew there was no danger for Aunt Nancy."

"I know—but—oh, *you* know! Sometimes one's nerves are pulled tight somehow, so that they sound loud to any touch upon them—and the night, I was awake a good deal—I was thinking about a great many things, trying to decide an important matter——" He pulled himself up sharply, realising that he was apologising, that he was in some way being

put on the defensive, and resenting the feeling. Under the close scrutiny of the girl's dark eyes his wandering fancies of the night shrivelled away till they seemed sentimental maunderings. This bracing, tonic, even acrid quality was what he felt he needed from her, but with an instinctive unreason he resented it sorely.

He turned away from her stiffly, toward where the other two talked together, but Caroline's penetrating, well-trained voice held him by her. "Who is that peasant girl, talking with the hotel-proprietor?" she asked.

"That girl!" cried Harry warmly. "That's our saviour. She is the interpreter we've been waiting for. She's the one who told me about the plasters."

"She!" cried the other. "Why, I thought it was to be an old woman who had been in Kansas."

"She's certainly not old, though I'm sure I don't know why we imagined she was going to be. But she's been in Kansas, born and brought up there, and talks American more Americanly than either of us poor specimens."

"What is she doing here?" asked Caroline with surprise so great that Harry's over-acute ear fancied a note of suspicion in it.

"And why shouldn't she be here as well as we? I'm sure I've not the faintest notion of her family affairs—but she must be of pure Norse blood by her look. Don't you think so?"

Caroline looked at the other woman in silence. The man smiled with a swift malice as at recognising a familiar trait, and said with a careless and hearty accent, "Isn't she about the finest specimen you ever saw!"

The malicious smile was dashed from his face by the open admiration in Caroline's eyes. "She's simply superb!" she cried, "and how that costume is just made for her! Just fancy how dowdy that lovely creature would be in shirtwaist and skirt."

Harry looked at her sharply, his knowing expression gone, his keen eyes wavering in doubt. He did not know the American girl, he confessed that to himself frankly, but he admired her.

Gunhild came towards them smiling a wide,



friendly greeting at the newcomer. "Caroline," said the young man, "this is Gunhild Larsen; Gunhild, this is Miss Morton."

There was a moment's pause during which the two women gave each other the swift, scrutinising survey of their sex. Then the Norwegian girl put out her hand with a hearty gesture of unembarrassed cordiality. "I'm *real* glad to meet you, Miss Morton," she said. "I'm like you—an American girl, too, you know."

## V

### Gumbld

**I**N spite of the cheer of the abundantly furnished table and the appetising odour of good coffee, the breakfast room was permeated with a savour of listless irritation. The three young Americans were eating their breakfast in a silence filled with the unceasing monotone of steadily falling rain. The very air in the room was thick with mist, and the window-panes streaming with water showed outside only shadowy masses in varying shades of grey.

The young man made a gesture of dissatisfaction. "Good Heavens! It's as bad as being under water! Eight days of this! If it's raining again to-morrow when I wake up I shall know exactly how Oswald felt in 'Ghosts.' I shall drop back in idiotic despair and clamour to be given the sun—the sun!"

Caroline shivered. "Don't joke about such an awful thing as 'Ghosts,'" she said, and there was

another silence. This was broken by Pollie, who started up from the table with a great clatter of overturned chair, and plunged to the window. Harry caught at a milk-pitcher tottering to destruction, and called with an edge of annoyance in his voice, "My faith, Pollie! We don't need a tornado in addition to the rainstorm! What under the sun can you find outside any window in this place to make you hurry to see it?"

Pollie turned back from the window, her little brown face steeped in desolation. "Nothing!" she answered shortly. "Nothing at all. But I thought I saw Gunhild coming. Oh, I do wish she'd hurry and get here! It's just awful without her."

Caroline rose from the table. "I should think you'd have enough of her, in all conscience, Pollie. She's been here all day long and all the evening, ever since we came, and now that you and Harry have begun your Norwegian lessons with her, you'll certainly——"

The little girl broke in impatiently. "That's all

you know about it, sister! We have such a little time to stay here maybe; *only* two weeks more, Aunt Nancy says,"—her sister gave a suppressed groan at this prospect of delay,—“and Gunhild has such millions of lovely stories to tell, I’m just sure we’ll have to go before I’ve begun to hear them all.” She looked at her sister’s clouded brow and went on with a little truculent air of defiance, “I love her, anyhow! I’d rather sit in her lap—she’s got such a strong lap—and hear her talk that funny, cute way she has—all down in her throat, part slang and part like a poetry book and part Western and part just—oh, different, than *anything*! Oh, I *wish* she’d come!” Caroline opened her lips to speak, and again the child cut her off. “Don’t you say a thing about her, now, for I know by your looks you’re going to say something mean. Aunt *Nancy* likes to have her here, anyhow, just awfully! She said yesterday she’d never had such an interesting attack of sciatica. She’s learning just how the real Norwegians live. Gunhild tells her *everything*!”

“I’ve noticed that,” remarked Caroline drily.

“Well, you needn’t think that either,” rejoined Pollie resentfully, undeterred from anger by the innocuous aspect of the last remark. “Aunt Nancy *makes* her talk and tell things. And she feels, anyhow, as though we were old friends, because we’re American, you know. She isn’t forward and pushing, and you’re mean to think so—oh, *dear!* I don’t know what makes me so horrid and spiteful to you. Everything seems to go wrong till Gunhild gets here.” She flung herself remorsefully upon her sister, half-crying. “I’m sorry I’m so cross, sister! I’m sorry! Oh, I *wish* she’d come!”

The tension of the group relaxed with the child’s impulsive voicing of it. Harry lighted his after-breakfast cigar and smiled at the little girl. “Perhaps she may have something else to do, Pollykin. I understand from what she says and from Aunt Nancy that she’s a very busy person indeed, with her weaving and washing and all.”

“Oh, but she’s taking a holiday now we’re here—she’s celebrating seeing home again, through us, she says——” Pollie broke off and looked with a spark-

ling and innocent malice at the young man's back. He had turned away indifferently from her explanation and was now looking from the window. "Oho!" she cried triumphantly, "you're watching for her yourself! You're just as much in a hurry to have her come as I am. You needn't try to fool *me!* I believe——" Caroline interrupted this speech by taking her little sister's hand and leading her to the door.

"It's not nice for little girls to talk so to young men," she said. "Come, we must go back to Aunt Nancy."

Pollie's grieved and honest protest came dropping down from the landing. "But it's *so*, sister. How can it be 'not nice' to say it, if it's so?"

Harry removed the cigar from his mouth to laugh aloud at the primæval naïveté of this remark, and continued smiling absently for an instant as he gazed out at the rain-soaked landscape. In a moment, however, the lowering gloom and sodden desolation of the scene struck the smile from his lips and he sat listlessly depressed, noting the various factors that

made up the forlorn and magnificent dreariness of the picture. The clouds hung low on the mountains. From where he sat he could see the fjord, beaten by the incessant torrent of rain to a dull slate colour. The towering mountains on the other shore were so shrouded in mist that they seemed ghostly and unsubstantial, made of the same substance as the clouds and frowning as cheerlessly as they upon a colourless, dejected world. "Good Lord! What a country for any one who is used to Kansas sunshine!" he exclaimed aloud. "Think of any one preferring this to the prairies! Of course he'd be the very one to insist on his family's coming back here after he was safely dead and buried in a live country!" He fell into a reverie at this, turning over in his mind the story which had so moved them all. He felt that he could understand the true significance of it better than the others, for he could bring visibly before his eyes the man as Gunhild described him, her insanely homesick father, the gaunt immigrant settler declaiming with a morbid longing for grey mists against the flaming sun which shone down inex-

orably day after day upon his exile: and the faded, parched woman—the first wife, Gunhild's mother—silently enduring the loneliness and isolation of the great plains and welcoming death as a deliverance from so strange and hateful a land.

'As for the amazing scene about the deathbed of her father, Gunhild's emotion in speaking of it brought home to her hearers something of its quivering and unreal tension. Henry Fox felt that he had seen that too, the haggard, fever-flushed old man, half-delirious, dreaming of the cool rivers and roaring cataracts of his birthplace, exacting from his distracted and weak young wife, herself a recent arrival and sick with longing for the home-land, the solemn promise to take his children back to Norway; the eighteen-year-old Gunhild, putting her hand in his and promising to go too, and take care of the helpless brood; and his sudden flickering out with the look of peace on his face—the first time, Gunhild said, she had ever seen it there.

The girl had gone on, wiping her eyes and looking gratefully at their sympathetic faces, to try and tell



of all that happened after her father's funeral until they arrived at his old home, but it seemed to her, so she said, like a confused and miserable dream. The claim which Olaf Larsen had taken up and cultivated in the intervals of his work on the railways, the little home where he and she had lived alone so long after her mother's death, the furniture, the bronco on which she had ridden to school, all the witnesses of her solitary, brooding, happy girlhood, were sold; and with the proceeds she and the clinging little stepmother had started on the long journey from western Kansas to Naesvangen. How desperately Gunhild had worked and fought to support them all in Norway was shown with a poignant vividness by the immensity of her relief when her stepmother married again—"such a *kind* man—who was willing to take care of all the children, just like an American man—all except Ingolf, of course!" she had cried in a burst of recurrent, amazed, and grateful appreciation. That happy event dated from but a few months back, and Gunhild had not had time to lose the first buoyancy of

her rebound from the crushing responsibility and incessant labour which had been hers for seven years.

The young American had found her joy in her extremely qualified freedom pathetic. It spoke eloquently of the hardships which must have darkened her life. "You don't know how happy I am now—just Ingolf to look after. I feel like a lady of leisure, as though I could stop and breathe once in a while and sometimes sit and read and sometimes be just good-for-nothing and lazy." She pronounced it "good-for-nawthin'" with a recurrence to the slovenly half-Southern, half-Western speech of uncultivated people with whom she had learned her English, and which lent an occasional singularly illiterate accent to her words. "Of course Ingolf is an awful care, but that's nawthin' after the others. I'm so sorry for him. He's so bad. Mebbe I'll have time now to try and find out how to manage him. I suppose I ought to just hustle and try and make money—money enough to have a doctor say what's the matter with him. A doctor that came

through here once told me mebbe the trouble was with something pressing on his brain."

She had said this on the first day she had come to them so anxiously, to know if the dwarf had said anything impertinent when Kaptejn Rivedal had tried to make him speak English. Harry had assured her that the only difficulty was that he refused to speak at all. Gunhild spoke with a sad certainty of her brother's motives, "Ah, he knew that was what would make Rivedal the maddest! He's just made wrong. He's never happy unless everybody else is mad or unhappy. Poor child! I'm the only person who can do a thing with him—and I can't do much! I can only just love him, and take care of him. Everybody in the valley is afraid of him—they call him 'Gunhild's devil.'"

Pollie had fired at this. "Well, I was sorry for him and I shook hands with him," she had protested hotly; and in the sudden embrace which Gunhild had given the child had begun the affection between them.

This picture was fresh in the young man's mind

as he ground out the fire in his cigar in his ash-tray and stood up, stretching his arms and yawning in a sort of ecstasy of *ennui*. As if in continuation of the scene he heard a wild scream of welcome from upstairs and Pollie's tempestuous descent to the hall to throw herself into Gunhild's arms. "Oh, you *dear*," she cried, "aren't you mean to be so late! And I have such a good lesson! Every single word learned. What made you so late?" Gunhild looked very serious as she hung up her dripping cloak, and smoothed her hair sparkling with drops of mist. "Do you really want to know why I was so late? Because as I was passing a waterfall, the fairy that lives in it—the Fossegrim, as they call the waterfall goblin here—put his head out and asked if there was a little girl from America down at Rivedal's house. He said he had a story he wanted me to tell her, and so I had to stop in all that rain and listen to every word: for you have to do always what the trolls tell you."

Pollie gazed at her in an uneasy, delighted incredulity. "Oh, honestly now, Gunhild, *did* he?

Are there *really* such things? Sister says there aren't and Harry says there are. Do you honest see them?"

The girl answered with a sudden pleased remembrance of a forgotten American phrase. "You betcher life I do!" she cried heartily, swinging the child up to her shoulder. "Come on along upstairs and I'll tell you all about it—you and Miss Fox too, if she'd like it!"

The house seemed very quiet after the sound of the two cheerful voices died away. The steady swish of the rain filled the room with dreariness—the room and his mind, thought the young man, wandering idly about. He felt very much bored and a little left out. Apparently it never occurred to Pollie that he could tell stories and be entertaining as well as Gunhild. Apparently it never occurred to Gunhild that she owed him more than the smiling nod over Pollie's head as they ascended the stairs. Apparently it never occurred to Caroline that now was a time for the American girl's renowned fascination and good-comradeship to shine forth, rather

than an opportunity to write letters to every acquaintance she could think of. Even as he complained to himself of her reserve he had a perverse satisfaction in it, divining with a subtle sympathy, which he felt with an instant self-scorn to be another effeminate trait, the pride which underlay it, the jealous unwillingness to seem to wish to please. "They're as proud as the devil—American women!" he thought appreciatively. "That's one reason why they're so much more honest than most women. It's not that they enjoy honesty as a positive thing, but that it would hurt their pedestalled vanity to contrive and manœuvre like most women."

With one of his quick turnings in his own thought he noted sardonically his fixed habits of finding an unworthy motive back of all actions—even those he admired. "Well, they are always there to find!" he commented grimly, as he mounted the stairs. "The day for unmixed motives has gone by—for all but infants like Pollie, or simple-minded childish folk like Gunhild."

As he passed the open door of the common sitting-room, he saw Gunhild sitting in the room beyond beside his aunt's bed, with Pollie on her lap. He paused irresolutely, in the corridor. It seemed the only spot of life in the house. Pollie beckoned him in vehemently. "Harry, that is the best story yet—come in and hear the end—no, don't you mind him, Gunhild. Go on—what happened then? Did the boy get away?"

The girl beamed one of her wide impersonal smiles upon the young man and went on, as absorbed in the legend as the child; "Well, the Fossegrim said if the boy could remember even a tenth part of what he had told him while he was under the water, he could go. And the boy said he couldn't say it but he could play it on his fiddle, if the Fossegrim would let him go home and get it. And so he scared his family 'most to death by busting in all soaking wet (they hadn't seen him for a week, you know!) and grabbing his violin and running back down the road. They all ran after him as hard as they could, but he just flew along and got to the waterfall ahead of

them, and when they came up to him he was playing on his violin the loveliest music you ever heard. He played and he played, and finally the Fossegrim put his head out of the water and called to him that he could go free—he had repeated so many of the things he'd heard while he was under the water. And so he stopped playing. But there was his family all mopping their eyes because his music had been so sweet and sad, and his father said he should go away and learn to be a great violinist and so he did—and went about all over the world telling people with his violin what the Fossegrim had said to him.”

She stopped, smiling at the little girl's rapt eyes. Pollie drew a long breath. “That was a perfectly terribly sweet story! Wasn't it, Aunt Nancy? Now tell us another!”

Gunhild laughed. “You're a greedy little pig, Pollie. You don't let me catch my breath. Besides, you'll have to wait till I hear another one from the trolls. Perhaps next time one of the sea-folk that live in the bottom of the fjord will stick his



head up over the water and tell me what they do down there."

Pollie squirmed in delighted anticipation. "That'll be fierce," she cried joyously, using a forbidden word, secure in her sister's absence. "But, Gunhild, do all the fairies in Norway live in water some way or other?"

"Sure they do, 'most of them! Where else is there for them? They can't dig into rock; and rock and water is about all there is here. Listen!"

In the moment's silence the steady monotone of the rain rose to a swelling diapason. Harry broke in impatiently. "Good Lord! *don't* listen to it or you'll go crazy. Talk and drown it out! Doesn't it *ever* stop raining in Norway?"

Gunhild shook her head, "Not in this western part! They say in the east it's not so bad, but here on the fjords . . . well, there's a proverb that it rains eight days a week in Bergen. Of course it doesn't pour down like this every day. We're having a real rainy spell now." The man insisted, "But truly, do you ever have really fair weather?"

Gunhild weighed the matter seriously and then shook her head again. "No, we don't hardly ever have a whole day perfectly clear. I haven't seen the sky blue from morning till night—blue without a cloud in it, you know, the way we have it in America. Every minute it changes. Mists come and go—the sky's all clouded up in a minute, a few drops fall, and then the next thing you know the sun's out bright and there ain't a cloud anywhere."

"Don't you find that very depressing for a steady diet?"

"I'm used to it now, but I used to feel like crying when all at once the blue sky would disappear and the sun be all covered up. I love the sun. You know anybody would that had been born in Kansas. Architect Pettersen said I was a regular heathen sun-worshipper."

"Who is that?" asked Miss Fox keenly, peering over her coverings.

"Why, if that ain't so!" cried Gunhild in surprise. "I thought I must have told you every single thing about us, but—oh, he was splendid! Only I'm

afraid you'll be awfully bored with my talking so much."

"If you've anything new to tell, tell it!" commanded the old lady from the bed. "I'm like Pollie. I want a new story. It's the least you can do for a poor old woman sick in a foreign land, with a red-hot wire in her hip—to entertain her with talk."

Harry flashed at his aunt an appreciation of her skill in putting the girl at her ease, but Miss Fox refused to answer his look. She was regarding Gunhild with shrewd eyes and the look of piercing observation her nephew knew so well. He smiled to himself. "There won't be an idea in the poor girl's head that Aunt Nancy hasn't classified and pigeon-holed by the time we leave," he thought, and sat back with indulgent amusement to watch the process. With his almost superstitious belief in his aunt's insight, he had a reverent sense of the noble benevolence which always accompanied it.

Gunhild began as though it were indeed a story she was about to tell. "Architect Pettersen was the kindest, best old man in the world, and I don't

know whatever I should have done when we first came here—if it hadn't been for him. I did his washing as long as he lived, and so I saw him at least once a week and generally lots more times than that; though I was so busy. But washing days, of course, always. It used to be fine, those days—such fun.”

Miss Fox removed her eyes from the girl's face long enough to exchange an amused look with her nephew over the peasant's naïve unconsciousness of anything unusual in this method of social intercourse.

“He was a really fine, great architect, so everybody said, but of course ever since I knew him he was a very old man, retired from business. He used to live up on the hill where Ingolf and I do now, where the old stone church is, and he knew lots and lots of interesting stories about it. They do say that has been a holy place since 'way before Christianity ever came to Norway. This place is awfully old, you know—where folks have always, always lived. It always used to seem to me, when Architect

Pettersen was telling me about it, that the air must be just thick with spirits of dead folks; there have been people here so long. Well, the hill where the church stands was always a place where they had religious doings. The old heathens used to sacrifice there, so he found out, and there was a temple of stone set up to worship Odin in. And then when the Catholics came in they built a stone church, and there it is to this day—right where they used to pray to Thor and Freja. It was partly fallen down and in ruins, but Architect Pettersen took his own money and repaired it and fixed it just the way it used to be, with the Catholic silver things for the altar, and the censers and all. It took him years to get it done, but he was so interested in old Norway and such things that he liked to do it. He loved Norway the way I love America.” She paused a moment and then laughed. “He had an awful time finding where the old Catholic things had gone. He was sure they must be around somewhere because people here never throw anything away, but it was so long since the Catholic times folks had forgotten all about what

belonged to the church. I remember how pleased he was when he found the brass censers. A woman way up the valley (where my stepmother and the children live now) was using them to carry salt to the sheep. And the holy-water bowl he found in the store. They had it for a measure for sugar. People thought he was a little crazy to bother about these old things, but he wasn't—a bit.

“And he was so kind to me! He could speak English, and I believe I'd 'a' forgotten how to talk if we hadn't talked together—only he had learned out of a book, and it sounded so queer at first. I got into the way of talking the way he did myself, after a while—part his way and part mine. It was mixing, like anything!” She turned to them suddenly with a question which apparently had suddenly come into her mind. “Do you notice anything funny about the way I talk? You see, I haven't spoken English now for a year—since Architect Pettersen died—except to Ingolf. I always talk English to him so I can tell him things without people understanding. You don't know how queer it seems to me to be

talking English right along. It's like thinking out loud,—for I always think in English, even yet. It's funny how when I talk to you I say everything right out, just the way you do when you're thinking. It seems somehow as though—'why, it's just English—it can't matter.' But, perhaps, I am too free to tell all that——”

She hesitated and looked timidly for reassurance to the invalid. Miss Fox roused herself and spoke with energy. “I'm an old woman, my dear, and I've only just learned that the only things worth saying *are* just those that come freshly and truly into your mind—everything else in the way of talk is a wicked waste of time in a world where we have but a few minutes to stay.” She put out her hand and rested it kindly on the girl's rough and reddened fingers. Her powerful old face softened to a sweetness unusual with her but irresistible when it came. “It's a rare pleasure to hear somebody who has the sense and courage to know that there's nothing to conceal. Come, go on telling us about the old architect and your life here. It's better than any story

to hear a girl from Kansas tell about life in Norway."

Gunhild flushed with pleasure and cast a soft look of gratitude at the sick woman. Pollie wriggled into a still more comfortable position in the girl's strong arms and lay with her head on the broad shoulder whence she could watch the face of the narrator. The dark elfish child and the glowing golden radiance of Gunhild made a pretty picture in a rather obviously picturesque style, Harry thought to himself; such a picture as an old-fashioned painter with simple, child-like ideas of contrast might make. Certainly nothing in the subdued style of the modern masters of subtle harmonies in low tones. But as he sat looking at them, his over-flexible mind gave one of its dizzying turns, and it suddenly seemed to him that plain and palpable loveliness was after all the true, everlasting beauty—that varying fads and fancies in subtleties and perversities might come and go, leaving untouched the old true joy of humanity in evident open fairness. He felt that the strong bold colouring of the girl's costume had the charm



for him of seeing a quick decisive action after an eternity of hesitations and fumbings. Her round white neck bore up the bloom of her tranquil face like the stem of a rosy and fragrant flower. She exhaled an odour of simplicity and supreme unconsciousness of complication. For a moment he envied her, watching her smile down at the child on her knee.

“About Architect Pettersen, I couldn’t begin to tell you all the lovely things he did for me—how wise he was, and what a great library he had, and how hard he tried to teach me to be clever—poor old man! He used to come over sometimes in the long winter evenings and read to me while I worked at my loom. He was always lending me books, too, and scolding so when I couldn’t stop work long enough to read them. Sundays I read all I could, between looking after the children.” She frowned and sighed as at an unpleasant recollection. “That was the only way we ever disagreed—he was an old man and very nervous and fretful, and he couldn’t bear the children’s noise. I’m afraid he hated Ingolf.

The poor boy seemed possessed to do the naughtiest things to him. I don't think he ever forgave Ingolf for breaking an old piece of stained glass he had found in some rubbish under the altar of the church. He said the boy was inhabited by the devil——” She paused and shook her head sadly like a grieved child, but flashed back into her usual half-pathetically smiling calm as she went on with her narrative, “And yet he was so kind to me. Why, he wanted to adopt me for his daughter—he didn't have any children of his own—and take me away to Christiania to live. He wanted me to take singing lessons and get a good education—but my goodness! I didn't have time even to think of such things! I asked him what in the world he thought would happen to my family.”

Miss Fox gave a smothered exclamation at this and seemed for a moment on the point of indignant speech. Gunhild explained herself farther with a limpid unconsciousness. “Don't you see, I was like the man of the house, you know. I *couldn't* go and leave them. So he just tried to educate me here.

I'm afraid I wasn't much of a student—I had so many other things to think of—but oh, he was *so* kind! That first winter I don't think I could have *lived* if it hadn't been for Architect Pettersen!

“You see, it was the first time I'd ever seen such a winter and I didn't really have my grown strength yet, and we were so worried about how to get on at all. You can't imagine what it's like! For five months we never see the sun, not once does he get high enough to look over the mountains. Of course it's quite daylight at noon most of the time, though for about a month we have a light burning all the time. Think of *never* getting a ray of real sunlight. And it begins to be dark at three in the afternoon and doesn't get light till ten or eleven in the morning, and you have only one little lamp, generally, to fight against all that darkness, because you can't afford more.”

Her voice dropped to a low monotone and she seemed almost to be unaware that she was speaking. “You don't know how like an awful dream it is, as if you would just *have* to wake up soon and find it a

nightmare—only you never do! The blackness gets closer and closer to you as the weeks go on—first just in the corners and dark places, and then steadily nearer to the light where you sit and work, and then sometime suddenly you wake and find it has got inside of you and you can't remember ever having known sunlight. And then you must just sit in the dark and work and fight to keep your wits and——” She shuddered and sat silent, lost in painful reminiscence.

Miss Fox spoke with horror, “What a picture! It's a wonder you didn't go mad!”

Gunhild roused herself and looked at her with a wide, direct gaze of unconscious self-revelation. “I think I would, if it hadn't been for Architect Pettersen and my great-grandfather. Of course he died years before I was born, but he's something to live up to. I'm glad I have him to think about. I only heard about him since I came back here. He was a soldier, and somehow in wandering around, he got into one of the armies of Napoleon. We have a little medal that the Emperor gave him for bravery on

the field of battle and he told him he had never seen a braver man—Napoleon Bonaparte did!”

She paused, looking about her with kindling eyes, and in the hush through the bare little room in that poor and remote country there resounded for a moment the mighty echo which the name of the great commander never fails to bring with it in any nation of Europe. “And of course one must be brave to deserve a grandfather like that. I look at the medal and think so many times of what he would have done, and feel ashamed to be so weak.”

“Weak!” cried Pollie the literal. “You, weak! Why, just think how you can toss me around! I think you’re the strongest woman I ever saw.”

The young man gave a startled look at the child. “You don’t know what you’ve said, Pollie,” he exclaimed, “but upon my word I think you’re right.”

## VI

### Til Saeter!

THE sun was almost shining. That is, the grey sky seemed thinned and paled by a struggling radiance behind it, and Gunhild prophesied cheerfully that they were to have probably three days of fine weather. She also announced that she had been able to induce an old cousin of hers to go up to the *saeter* and take her place for as long as the Americans needed her in the valley. The woman who had been hastily summoned from another *saeter* the night of Gunhild's sudden descent could stay no longer, but though the old cousin was already established in the *saeter* hut the girl professed herself uneasy about her management of the cattle without a proper initiation into the mysteries of the craft. "I ought to go up there for a day myself and tell her which cows need to be gentled and how much salt to give the sheep. That is, if you can get along

without me——” She looked doubtfully at Miss Fox propped picturesquely against the pillows with more vigour in her face than since her arrival.

The old maid spoke with something of her usual energetic emphasis. “My dear child, you make me ashamed of myself—of all of us. We haven’t realised how tyrannically we have taken possession of you. The idea of your feeling that you must apologise for looking after your own affairs!”

She looked at Caroline for a seconding of her apology, but the girl turned away indifferently and picked up a book. Miss Fox thereupon continued, “My conscience! We don’t own you—though I must say for the present it would be very convenient if we did! We clutched at you so when you came, we’ve forgotten to let go now we haven’t such a frantic need for you. Why, of course go along and see about your dairy business. I only wish I could go with you. My New England curiosity is at fever-heat to know what you *saeter* girls do all summer long, all by yourselves.”

Gunhild smiled. “We have plenty to do. There

are lots of cows to milk and we make butter and ever so many different kinds of cheese. And you must keep an eye on the sheep, and they are *such* idiots! And the little cabin has to be as clean as clean—every crack and log, or the milk will sour before it should. But there are a good many hours in the long day when you can only sit and knit, and that's bad. It's a waste of time for one thing, but the worst is you're apt to get fancies. *Saeter* girls are always seeing trolls and such-like from being alone too much."

"Why don't you take your loom up there?—you wouldn't have to work so feverishly at your weaving in the winter time if you could have all those leisure hours."

"Oh, Miss Fox, it makes me laugh to think of it! And if you could just see the path I climb you'd laugh too. You might as well think of taking a piano to the top of a mountain as my big loom, and the little cabin wouldn't hold it and me too."

Miss Fox had the unconvinced look of the professionally competent woman confronted with an



apparent impossibility. Some of her customary energy animated her response. "If I were well enough to get out, I believe *I* could get it up there somehow," she averred.

Gunhild smiled indulgently. "Perhaps you could—but *then* how I would have to work! I've a few books up there now, that Architect Pettersen gave me, and I've read those to pieces. I wish you *could* get up there and visit me. I love it! The sun shines there for whole days together—such long days from three in the morning till ten at night, and it's so still and high."

"Doesn't any one ever get up there to see you?"

"Once an English traveller got lost on the mountains and wandered around for two days before he found my *saeter*. I gave him something to eat and showed him the right path, and he said the view from a rock near my cabin was the finest he'd ever seen, and he had been all over Norway. He was a nice old man. That has been the only thing that's ever happened there—his coming and going, and I often think about him when I stand near the rock. It's

such a comfort to look out and see something beside a wall as high as the sky."

"By Jove, you make me want to see the place!" cried Harry.

Miss Fox stirred quickly in the grasp of an inspiration. "See here, Harry, why don't you and Caroline go up with Gunhild to-morrow? You've been cooped here an interminable time in a sick room. You'll enjoy the change and I'll feel less guilty about giving you such a stupid time. Pollie's learned enough Norwegian to take care of me for a day. Go along—if Gunhild doesn't mind taking you with her."

Gunhild was speechless with a childlike rapture at this prospect. She turned her eyes from one to another with a single-hearted joy for which she could find no words. Then her face fell. "Only, the climb up there—it's awfully rough; like going up a ladder with most of the rungs out. I'm afraid Miss Morton——"

Harry broke in with a hearty negation of this doubt. "Ah, you don't know about American

young ladies. They're up to anything. Why, Miss Morton was one of the star athletes in her class in college—took all kinds of prizes; didn't you, Caroline? You can't set her any climbing that'll be too hard."

There was a moment's pause. Caroline did not speak. The young man addressed himself to his aunt, and went on warmly. "I never get over my joyful surprise in realising the difference between American and European women. Not only can the Americans do interesting things, but they are so gallantly ready for new enterprises. The first flush of your enthusiasm is not worn off persuading reluctance to be eagerness."

"Well, I should say not!" Pollie assured them vaguely but proudly; "of course sister'll go."

Caroline had for the space of a breath a hot wave of resentment at being thus baldly but irresistibly managed. She recognised not only the practised skill with which the operation was effected but also the fact that the young man was not even expending his best efforts on her, that there were extremities

of *finesse* quite at his fingers' end which he did not trouble to use for her. And she was helplessly aware that he did not in very truth need these, since she felt herself unable to resist the simple methods of his careless ease. The instant Miss Fox had suggested the excursion she had decided against it. Gunhild was a most unusual creature, but one could have enough of her, and the American girl was startled to feel a sudden thrill of delight at the prospect of a long day alone with Harry, like one or two days they had had in England when his aunt was slightly indisposed. She had said firmly to herself that nothing could induce her to spend the day climbing up and down the mountain with a milkmaid. And yet when Harry finished his careless little apostrophe to American girls, and Pollie looked so proudly at her big sister, and Miss Fox called from the bed, "I'm delighted that there's something to do in this deathly hole," Caroline felt that it was impossible to refuse. She told herself angrily that there was no reason for going if she did not wish to, but the impalpable net which the young man threw

over her decision was as strong as it was light. With a flame of inward rebellion she heard herself agreeing to start early the next morning.

The white mist still hung low along the flanks of the mountains as the little party walked briskly away from the hotel. Gunhild explained that the thicker and heavier the mist the better the weather would be later. "It's like it was too much to give us, a clear morning and a clear afternoon. There ain't that much sunshine to waste on just one day. When it's very clear in the morning it usually rains before night—though, as far as that goes, it usually rains before night anyhow." She laughed aloud as she flung this taunt at the weather, and continued smiling with the wide, vague brilliance of a child before a great pleasure. A happy excitement quickened and sharpened her usually slow and loose speech.

"This is a great event for me," she assured them gaily. "Two such visitors! I must remember every single solitary thing that happens, so I can have it to think about in the long time when I'm so

alone. If only Miss Fox could go too! It would be like having the place blessed by the pastor to have her there."

To Harry's flash of pleasure at this appreciation she went on, "Somehow you could never be afraid of anything where she is, could you—not even of trolls. Well, you're here anyhow. I do hope you'll like it there and won't find the path too steep."

Harry looked at Caroline, who at once announced she loved mountain climbing above every other pursuit. Gunhild went on talking light-heartedly. "It's so lovely just to go back there for a day and then to have you two along! Oh!—oh! I just bet you don't know what you're going to have for dinner!"

The two Americans exchanged amused smiles. "I just bet we don't," echoed Caroline with a spice of malice.

"*Rømmekolle! Rømmekolle!*" chanted Gunhild in mysterious triumph. "Of course, other things too. Rivedal put up a lot in this basket, but the main thing will be *Rømmekolle*."

"I gather it's to eat and not to wear or play on?" suggested Harry dubiously.

"Just you wait and see. It's the best stuff you ever ate! I never have it myself except on grand occasions—but there couldn't be a grander one than this, could there?"

"What is it?" asked Caroline, smiling as though at a child.

"You'd never guess in the wide world. You eat it out of a wooden tub as big as that." She rounded her arms into a circle, and looked at her companions over an imaginary tub, nodding and smiling, her face all alight with animation. Harry felt that there was something infinitely pathetic in a life so utterly devoid of all incident as to be stirred by this small excursion.

Caroline laughed, as she sometimes did,—her father's humorous chuckle. "Well, I've never eaten anything out of a tub yet, but I'm willing to try as long as it's not the natural soapy contents of a tub."

At this mild jest Gunhild bubbled over into open

amusement. "My! how good it is to laugh!" she cried.

"Show me a tub hidden about you anywhere," demanded Harry incredulously.

"Oh, the tub's up there!" She pointed up to the wall of rock which now overhung the road. "And by the time we get up there I bet you'll be so tired and hungry you'll be ready to eat anything—even soapsuds!" She turned from the main road and began to ascend what seemed to the Americans the dry bed of a mountain torrent.

"Where are you going?" they called, aghast.

"To the *saeter*!" she flung down at them gaily. "This is the path," and she continued climbing. As they paused, she turned, and began singing in a curious, rich, uncultivated voice an infectiously inspiring call of the countryside, a snatch of the heartening melody which puts vigour into lagging footsteps on the long way up to the *saeter*.

"*Til Saeter! Til Saeter! Nu synker solen ned!*" she chanted, and pointed up with the gesture of a captain leading a charge.



"Good Heavens!" ejaculated the young man, "that's a fearful climb. I don't believe you can do it, Caroline!"

The girl-athlete's pride was roused. "Nonsense!" she cried, springing valiantly from rock to rock.

"You mustn't begin like that," warned the Norwegian, toiling steadily up and placing her large, shapeless shoes solidly and carefully before each step. "You'll wear yourself out."

"Not I," flashed Caroline, darting past her on the tops of the large stones. She was far ahead of them in a moment, and Harry, looking up, noted the steel-like strength that must underlie her slender grace.

He felt suddenly his old impulse to overtake her, to outdo her, to run the race beside her. "I'm after you!" he shouted, forgetting the peasant girl by his side. Caroline called some laughing and unintelligible challenge over her shoulder as she increased her speed. The young man pulled his cap firmly on his head and set off at so break-neck a pace that Gunhild called out in unheeded alarm. In a mo-

ment more Caroline had disappeared around a turn in the path.

He redoubled his speed and was putting forth every effort as he turned the same corner and came upon Caroline, seated tranquilly pinning a cluster of bluebells at her waist. She looked up with a merry surprise. "Dear me! What a hurry you are in!" she mocked prettily.

Harry flung himself at full length beside her, panting. "Oh, *you!* you woman! You very essence of femininity!" he accused her gaily.

In the little silence which followed until Gunhild's slow, plodding arrival Caroline felt herself, as of old, surrounded by his admiration, warmed by the singularly glowing radiance of his silent smile. She was excessively happy, as though some impalpable barrier in her path were removed, as though some half-felt constraint were gone, as though both she and her companion were themselves again. She smiled back at him silently and contentedly and Harry noticed how much she resembled her little sister.

Gunhild broke the silence by reproaches cast at them from a distance. "If you do that again," she assured them, "I'll have to carry you the last half of the way."

Indeed, as the journey progressed there was little strength left in either of the visitors for play. The mists burned away before intense sunshine which beat down upon the rocky hillside. Harry first called a halt, but Caroline who had been climbing doggedly up in a determined silence, dropped down at once on a stone. "I don't know about you ladies," he said, stopping suddenly short, "but I shall certainly have apoplexy if I go another step without resting." Gunhild sat down with a gesture of compunction. "I forgot you ain't used to it. It *is* warm."

"Warm!" exclaimed the other. "Talk about Norway being a cool place!" He mopped his forehead and rubbed his handkerchief around inside his collar, with a humorously exaggerated gesture. Caroline laughed. "It always amuses me to see you do something awfully American, like that, Harry."

"Why?" he demanded jealously.

"Oh, it looks so out of keeping. You never seem quite like a real American to me!"

"Why, I never!" ejaculated Gunhild eagerly. "Mr. Fox seems the most like an American of anybody I ever saw. Just my idea of one."

"Well, that's because you haven't seen many lately."

"My sakes! I *am* an American! I ought to know," persisted the Norwegian.

"Yes, you're the same kind of an American that Mr. Fox is—a sentimental one from a distance." She laughed outright at Harry's sudden threatening gesture. "You're *too* easy to tease!"

Gunhild cast an estimating glance up at the sun. "It's about eleven o'clock and if we are going to get to the *saeter* at three we must be moving on."

Harry groaned. "Four more hours of this climb?"

"Oh, it's lots worse than this," Gunhild told them encouragingly.

They fell again into a silent line and made their

laborious way with a stolid resolution up the path. Once or twice they stopped to rest and eat some biscuits, and once Caroline's courage almost failed her at the sight of a cliff they must ascend. As they rested panting at the top of this, Harry asked, "How in the world do you get cows up to your *saeter*? Any self-respecting American cow would impale you instantly at the sight of a place like that."

"Norwegian cows are different," said Gunhild gravely. "They are like American girls; they can go anywhere."

Caroline turned her head quickly and looked sharply at the girl, whose honest eyes met hers with their usual limpid clearness. But in looking away the American girl caught the last trace of a quickly suppressed smile under Harry's moustache. "Come, do let us get on!" she said impatiently, rising to her feet.

The trees began to grow smaller and more stunted, and open ground appeared. "We are getting near," said Gunhild. "The cabin is just above the tree line."

Caroline was too exhausted for speech. She still walked unsteadily forward, but her face was pale to the lips and her knees shook. When at last they emerged into an open green meadow at the upper edge of which was a little hut, and their guide announced that they had arrived, she sank on a clump of dry heather with a gasp, her heart drumming in her ears and the world misty and wavering before her eyes. Not so indistinct, however, but that she saw Harry turn away without a glance at her and break into a loud exclamation of amazement.

“Good Heavens! It’s impossible. Such a view is quite simply unbelievable. It can’t be!”

“That’s just what the old Englishman said,” returned Gunhild proudly.

They stood side by side, looking in rapt silence at the superb panorama. Five thousand feet below, the fjord stared with a steady gaze into the sky, reflecting in its blue-green polished surface the towering mountains which rose about it, thrusting their daring snow-capped peaks to an incredible height

against the clouds. Beyond them rose other peaks, and then others, and dominating all one huge white arm of the glacier lay pointing an icy finger up to a broad expanse of everlasting snow.

An eagle high above their heads, a black dot in the blue, but swinging slowly about with the unmistakable motion of a large bird, removed the very sky to an incalculable distance from them. Distances, heights, expanses—everything was on so prodigious a scale that all sense of proportion was lost. The young man's head whirled. Instead of feeling immeasurably tiny and dwarfed before this supreme immensity, his heart swelled within him, till it seemed that he too was huge to match this portentous country. He felt that he could stride from one of those great peaks to another, like Thor himself, thundering. He grew physically dizzy, threw himself down on the ground and closed his eyes.

When he opened them again, the hallucination had passed and he could observe calmly. Across the fjord from a height of a thousand feet, a wide river

plunged in a foaming cataract into the still water below. The sun shone full upon it, reflecting in a dazzling silver beam of light. Harry was struck with the fact that apparently the whole thing was an optical illusion, for there was not a sound to be heard except the pleasant splashing of a little brook at his feet. The huge mass of water hurled itself down in a spectral silence. Not for some moments did he realise that it was so far distant that none of the tumult of its descent could reach his ears.

He turned to point this out to Gunhild, forgetting that it must be a familiar phenomenon to her, and saw that she too was gazing fixedly at the cataract, an odd, blank look in her eyes. He spoke to her and she did not answer. Then she roused herself, drew a long breath, and shook her head impatiently, as though dismissing an unwelcome thought. "The Fossegrim who lives in that waterfall is a very dangerous one," she said gravely, "very strong and very wise—oh, he knows too much. I am afraid of him. From my home in the valley I see him and from here—never a minute since we came that he



hasn't been motioning to me—and so dreadfully still.”

She paused, passed her hand over her eyes, and tried to laugh. “You must think I'm perfectly crazy,” she added with a nervous, apologetic smile. “I've got so used to your aunt's understanding all my queer fancies it seems as if you could, too. She always knows what I mean! We do get queer, living in this dark valley all winter and alone on the mountains in summer. Some families are always a little off—father and son, son and father, right back as far as the parish records go. Architect Pettersen told me I'd go mad if I stayed here always: but he didn't realise about my great-grandfather's medal.” To Harry's look of surprise she explained: “That always stops my being dizzy and upset, just the minute I look at it. And then I've so much to do for Ingolf—oh, *poor* Miss Morton!” She had caught sight of Caroline, lying on the heather with white face and closed eyes. “She's perfectly used up!”

Caroline sat up and tried to smooth her hair with

trembling fingers. She looked more than tired,—hurt and out of humour; and she had an aggrieved feeling that their positions of the first part of the day were quite reversed; that now it was Gunhild who ran lightly ahead, luring Harry to follow, while she came painfully behind. “I am a little tired,” she said coldly. “If I could have something to eat?”

The Norwegian uttered an exclamation of dismayed remorse and darted off to the hut, returning with two wooden cups of creamy milk which she explained were to keep them from starving until she could serve the picnic lunch. “You’re to have *Rømmekolle*, don’t forget,” she called over her shoulder with hospitable pride.

The little mystery was kept until the last. The cloth was spread on the point overhanging the fjord and all the viands from the hotel were set about on it, before Gunhild and her old helper emerged from the hut, each with a small oval tub which was evidently heavy. Harry ran to help and exclaimed in delight as he saw their contents.

"Blessed shades of my German schooldays if it's not '*dicke Milch!*'"

"What's that?" called Caroline.

"That's the greatest dairy dainty in the world, and I haven't eaten it since I was fourteen."

They set the tubs down, and Caroline too exclaimed in recognition: "What! *That?* Why, that's nothing but sour milk!"

"It may be in America, but not when you eat it here. You sprinkle powdered zwieback and sugar all over it and then you just skim off the thick cream—don't you?" he appealed to Gunhild, glowing over his appreciation of her poor delicacy.

They both began with a zest on this mountain dish, and Caroline tasted a little. "I don't care what you *call* it," she said neutrally; "it is nothing but sour milk. I think I'll make my dinner on the things from the hotel."

Gunhild regarded her with disappointed eyes, "Oh, I'm so *sorry!* I never dreamed of your not liking it! I've been counting on giving it to you as a treat. I'm so sorry."

"So am I," returned the other. "If you had told me it was sour cream I could have said at once—I can't eat it."

Harry laid down his spoon and surveyed her sideways with an enigmatic expression. He caught one end of his moustache in his teeth and seemed to consider in a silence which Caroline found ominous. Then he fell to again, eating heartily and smiling at their hostess. "Don't you mind, Gunhild," he said emphatically. "I'll eat Miss Morton's share. She really doesn't know any better."

Caroline frowned slightly at being the subject of an apology, and the meal was finished in a constrained silence.

Afterwards the dairymaid said they should lie down and rest on the heather while she looked after her affairs. The two Americans were left alone, and neither of them spoke. The man went on with much deliberation finishing a small section of cream left in the tub. He ate with a great appearance of enjoyment. "Harry!" said the girl sharply and looked at him angrily, a little flush mounting to her

face. A spark of resentment gleamed for an instant in her eyes, but meeting an opaque and impassive regard from him she shifted her position and looked away. Finally she shrugged her shoulders impatiently with an inarticulate exclamation of displeasure, and moved towards a stunted bush on the other side of the point.. Under the shade of this she lay down with her back to the view and entrenched herself in a formidable silence.

## VII

### On the Heights

**W**ITH some surprise, the American found himself curiously little affected by her bad humour, he who usually was so impatiently but helplessly responsive to the temper of any woman near him. Turning away from her, he was straightway transported into a strange mood of his own.

He picked his way out to the last ledge of the point of the cliff, from where he could look down on the fjord and barren valley, already sombre in the shadow of the mountains, and up at the peak of grey rock which he had watched during his first night in Naesvangen. That night came vividly back to his mind—his visions which had seemed so futile in the light of the day's dawn and Caroline's eyes; his aspirations for a truly successful life which had seemed so chimerical once the twentieth century was again pressing on him; his vague longings for some-

thing different in very essence from the idle life he had known or the tearing, rending strife he had observed; for a victory which should be painless to others. All this had dwindled away into a conviction that he was a weak dreamer, refusing to do what was possible because of a foolish, impractical ideal.

He looked down on the very spot where he had sat and was suddenly smitten with a half-superstitious realisation of the symbolism of his position—thus infinitely high above the place of his doubts, on the lofty crag which had first directed his eyes upward, and he felt within him that, without knowing it, he had indeed climbed high since that time of incredulity. His fancies did not seem so vague, so more than impossible, so hackneyed and sentimental. They seemed hovering near him, dreams that might be made actual life if he could but free himself from chains of other people's imposing, and wake to action.

Suspended thus, immeasurably above the dusky valley where men dwelt in twilight, groping and

blind to the possibilities of light above them, he felt a gusty breath of resolution blow upon him. It was ignoble to desert an ideal without striking one blow to defend it—even an ideal so imperfectly conceived, so faintly shadowed forth in his poor convention-ridden mind. A sudden satiric, thrusting question of himself he put out of sight with determination. No, he knew himself too well to be shaken with that self-suspicion. He was not a romantic boy, nor yet a slave to his senses, to be deluded by a lovely face into self-deceiving, sophistical reasonings. That doubt had come to him only because of his too-present feeling for the always belittling judgment of his world. He was better than the world he had always considered his, at least he was capable of being better; his father's son must be. He had his father's sister as proof of the nobility of that long-dead spirit.

The sunlight crept up towards him on the mountain side and the valley sank into deeper shadow. If a man could but once reach the heights, see!—he need never even be aware of the existence of the



valley people. Their words of blasting scepticism and sick, infectious disbelief need never come to his ears, bathed in a golden silence. The sun shone upon him through an air incredibly clear. Not even a mote danced in the long, slanting beams. The silence was unearthly, expectant. His soul moved lightly to his body's outmost boundary, and he felt merged into one being with all the refulgent peace about him.

After a time Caroline sat up, a smooth, mask-like expression on her face; announced that at last she saw Gunhild approaching, and suggested that they begin the descent. The young man protested with an energy which surprised himself—"Oh, no—*not* yet! We must see the last of the sun, here. It's never dark, you know, and we can go down as well after nine as now."

Caroline made no reply as they both turned to Gunhild, who approached them, a radiant figure in the flood of light. She held up in one rough, reddened hand a cluster of flowers made up of in-

numerable tiny pink blossoms, growing two on a single stem.

"Do you know this flower?"

The other two shook their heads in silence.

"It's one of the great things around my *saeter*—one of the reasons I love the place so. Don't you want to hear about it?"

Harry looked at her strangely as though he did not hear her light talk, but Caroline murmured something in the nature of a perfunctory assent, and repressed a smile at the naïve pride of the other in her tiny scrap of knowledge.

"It only grows in Scandinavia. A wise man discovered it and he always said no name was good enough for it, and to him, for all he was a great botanist, it was always 'the nameless flower.' But when he died folks called it by his own name. Architect Pettersen told me all about it. It's the *Linnea*."

"After Linnæus," commented Caroline.

"Was he a botanist?" asked Gunhild. "I don't think I ever heard of him."

"Yes, he was a botanist—quite a botanist," answered the college graduate with a dry accent as she reached for one of the flowers.

Harry was already inhaling the curiously strong yet delicate odour which almost visibly poured from the tiny pink bells. He said nothing and his eyes were fixed on the blossom.

Gunhild went on with her explanation. "They only smell sweet when they grow in the sunshine. Those in shady places don't smell a bit. People say that those are like men without souls—but if folks are as little to blame for not having souls as flowers are for not being able to get sunshine—you *have* to have sunlight to grow a perfume or a soul either!"

Harry looked down into the valley now almost black as seen through the level rays of sunlight, striking across from the opposite mountain, forming a sort of golden ceiling to the depths.

"It's like the floor of Heaven, ain't it?" murmured Gunhild, following his eyes. "Sometimes I feel as though I could just run out on it as safely as I walk here. Of course it's foolish, but somehow it's good

once in a while to feel you can do something that nobody can—it sort of breaks a chain.”

Harry cast at her a startled look of one surprised in a secret thought, but was still silent.

They sat down on a ledge of rock and for a time watched the steady advance of the line of light up the mountain side toward them. Then Gunhild began to speak in a singularly hushed voice of only half-conscious meditation. It was as though in the wide, empty silence, they were overhearing her thoughts, as though in that spot where she had passed such endless solitary days she were but half-aware that she was not alone. “I’m always so sorry for the little pink flowers that grow way, way down in the valley where the sun never gets to them—or only a few minutes in midsummer! Sometimes I think maybe the wise man made a mistake when he said the *Linnea* only grows in Scandinavia—perhaps they really came from somewhere else and only grew this lovely perfume because they had been so in the dark here at first. You see they’d come into the valleys first and nearly die of home-

sickness for the sun, and then they'd begin to climb; and when they first struck a high place like this where the sun shines so long and so strong, they would just die if they couldn't be different somehow from what they'd been before, to show how grateful they were: and proud they'd climbed till the sun could find them. So they'd all at once begin smelling so sweet, so sweet—that's the smell of gratitude, and they have such a short time to be warmed and fragrant they must be quick about it and send out in two months as much perfume as southern flowers use for all the year. I know something how they feel—I'm that way about your visit in Naesvangen—your being so kind to me—just your being here! I can't seem to appreciate it enough—I keep thinking I'm not enjoying it enough——” She broke off, withdrew her eyes from the golden light below them, and smiled at her companions with an inexpressibly touching warmth. Caroline's eyes held hers for an instant, and when she looked away the spell of her low-toned reverie seemed to be broken, for she spoke hesitatingly, with a sudden access of self-conscious

doubt, "I get funny notions staying up here by myself—I suppose they seem very silly to you two who know so much? I suppose it sounds foolish to be sorry for flowers—as though I was sort of putting on airs, maybe? I don't mean to—I don't know if you get at what I'm trying to say——"

She paused and looked at Caroline shyly.

The American girl held up her enigmatic and daunting shield of silence before the peasant struggling for expression. Gunhild's face flushed in shamefaced discomfort. Harry gave one of his quick, compelling glances at Caroline, but her eyes were fixed on the process of buttoning her gloves. He waited an instant and then broke his silence for the first time. Something indefinable in the quality of his voice made Caroline lift her head, startled. He spoke gravely, seriously, but with a vibrant echo of involuntary emotion. "I know just what you mean, Gunhild, and I share your feeling. It is sad that lovers of the sun should be exiled to a place of twilight. It makes me wish to transplant them to a brighter country and make them happy always. I

love the sun and the wind too—as you do, you know.” He fell into a reverie, looking past Gunhild’s golden head gleaming in the sunshine like a yellow flower.

Then quickly his eyes shifted to her face and Caroline uttered a strange, half-choked exclamation as he gave the Norwegian, looking at him with wide, absent eyes, his radiant gaze of intimacy. The American girl rose to her feet with a start and moved a step or two away. This movement passed unnoticed by Harry, but Gunhild turned her head, apprehensively. “Aren’t you comfortable, Miss Morton?” she asked. “Sit here close to me and I’ll spread out my great heavy skirt for a cushion for you. I’d offer to keep the wind off—only there isn’t a breath.” She addressed herself again to the man, “You were speaking of wind. Do you notice how still it is, even up here? You’d think up on this top o’ the world some air would stir! But you see even the birch leaves don’t shake. It’s always holding its breath here in this corner of Norway—so deathly still!”

"You have the sound of running water always," put in Caroline argumentatively.

"Yes, you *do*! You bet you do! It gets perfectly distracting, too. For the first year I was here I was nearly wild about it. I can't tell you—it got so I couldn't bear it—always, always, always that roar. It gets inside of your head after a while so you hear it all night in your sleep. I was awfully sick for a time after we'd been here about six months, and that was the worst part. I was so scared I'd die and have to be buried where I could never be quiet with the water yelling in my ears. After I got well, I used to nearly kill myself climbing around trying to find a quiet spot—but you can't do it. If you stay long enough in any one place some river or *foss*—that's a waterfall, but mostly they are about the same—comes shouting at you. Up here is the best. There's only this brook and I don't mind his little talk." She hesitated and looked uneasily across the fjord. "But there's always the Fossegrim over there—and for all I hate their noise so much, he's the very worst of all for being so still."



Harry fixed his eyes steadily on the huge white figure and tried to discern some movement in it. He strained his ears to catch an echo of the uproar of its plunge. Gunhild answered as though he had spoken. "No, you can't do it. I've sat here for hours, staring at it, trying to see that it's just water moving, or to hear something. Sometimes you wonder if it's not really a giant troll, beckoning you——"

"Have you ever been there?"

The peasant girl laughed. "How should *I* ever have! You don't know how frightfully poor I've been. It's three hours from Naesvangen with four rowers in the boat—and I'd never in all my life save up money enough for that. Besides, people wouldn't let me. One of my great-grandmothers went crazy from the noise of a waterfall back of her house, and they don't think it's a good thing for any Larsen woman to go around them. I wish I could go—though I'd be scared. It seems as if I wouldn't be afraid of him any more, once I knew he was just a waterfall—like waking up out of a bad dream

that's scared you—though I'm sure I don't know what I *am* afraid of now." She ended, confusedly lost in an unwonted attempt at metaphysical speculations.

The young man looked at her in surprise. "Why, you really are afraid of it, aren't you?" he exclaimed with a note of amusement in his voice. "What is it, after all, that the spirits in waterfalls do to harm people?"

Gunhild flushed and looked down in an abashed silence. Harry flushed too, and spoke with a return to his hushed, intimate voice. "Believe me, Gunhild, I didn't mean to make light of you—I'm sorry I seemed to. Please pardon me." He leaned towards her and looked at her earnestly.

She raised her honest eyes to his and smiled a little tremulously. "Why, of course, you're right—it's ignorant and foolish of me. I—I—forgot you didn't belong here on the *saeter* with me."

The man made a gesture of impatient self-reproach. "There's nothing in the world I want so much as that you shall think just that. And I've

broken the spell myself. Forgive me! Take me back. Show me you've forgiven me by telling me truly about the spirits in the cataracts—just as though you were talking to yourself. I want to know about them. Please do."

He spoke without too heavy or significant an emphasis, but he poured upon her a half-imploring, half-commanding gaze that was wholly serious. The girl began, soberly, like a child sure of sympathy. "It's not just the way the ignorant people believe that I do—but there is something underneath what they think—though they get it all twisted, as I do! All the waterfall spirits aren't bad—most of them are just mischievous, you know, like naughty boys: and even those that are dangerous, like him"—she nodded across to the silent fall—"they don't know what harm they do. The people here in the valley say that the dangerous ones call and call you until you must go in where they live behind the water, and then, of course, you never come out. Common folks they treat that way—people who don't know the meaning of the call; but an artist or

a musician, he knows or he feels what it means, and if he has ever heard a Fossegrim call, then he can play the heart out of your body.”

She stopped, confusion again overcoming her and a deep blush of embarrassment rising to her forehead, but under the steadying, compelling eyes of the young man she went on in a voice lower and lower, with long pauses between the sentences. “I’ve thought about it a great deal, sitting up here and looking at him and remembering all the old stories and about my great-grandmother’s madness, and I think perhaps this is what’s at the bottom of the legends. The Fossegrim from just being so old and having seen the world so long, so long, knows what it all means, all the badness and the goodness and the pain and the loneliness: he knows why it is all so. He knows why we’re always doing what makes us unhappy—he knows, I suppose, why my father spent all his life burning up on the prairie, heartsick for Norway, and why I must spend all mine in a black valley with a roof of clouds, shut up in a prison I can only just dream myself out of at

nights. He must know why poor bad Ingolf was made so wrong and why I am so stupid that I can't help him. There must *be* a meaning to everything—I'm more than ever sure so, since I've met your aunt; there must be a bright meaning—and the Fossegrim is so old and wise that he knows it. So, since he has a loud, strong voice, he calls it out, over and over to any one who will listen. If common folks hear it that is dreadful, for they're not meant to know the meaning and they can't say it anyway to other people. All they should do is to live it the best way they can and pray to do as little harm as possible. So they can't bear to know all at once what's not for them and they go mad and throw themselves into the water——”

Although her voice was still very low, during the last sentence it had grown bravely certain, and as she went on and finished she looked at the young man with a touching and courageous faith in his sympathy and understanding. “But if a violinist hears—he too goes a little mad, for nobody can feel all that and ever be again what folks call sane—only

he has a way he can try and tell it to other men and so he can go away safe and sound. But all his life he can't do anything else but sing over and over with his violin the dreadful and lovely things the Fossegrim told him, and for a minute make other men's hearts soft and understanding." She ended with a noble boldness, speaking aloud and holding her head high.

Harry looked at her for a long moment in silence and she met his eyes with none of her usual child-like naïveté—rather as an equal to another, her eyes beaming with a steady, lambent glow. It was the instant when the line of sunlight was sweeping over them, in its passage up the mountain. Seated a little below her, he was already in shadow, while as though in a vision she was surrounded and bathed in a radiance like a halo, her broad braids glistening like a crown. An indescribable aroma of vitality and purity was exhaled from her whole personality.

Small considerations, the conventionalities, the thousand base and mean barriers to free and deeply human life, dropped away from the man.

It was as though the Fossegrim had spoken to him and he was blessed for a moment with a vision of the large and real meaning of life—life as it could be lived by the woman before him. The giant peak of rock held him uplifted in the sunshine above the shadow of the valley with no greater certainty than he was for the moment held above the ignoble commonplaces of existence by the serene beauty of soul he divined in her beautiful body.

Then of a sudden the sunlight swept up beyond her, and she sat in the shadow with him. On the instant a chill breathed upon them from below and Caroline rose, shivering and pale.

The descent to the valley was a very quiet one. Caroline seemed too exhausted to speak, Gunhild was far away in a reverie, and Harry trod like one in a dream. Once as Caroline sat to rest and Gunhild walked on before them, the American girl broke the silence. "Harry, did you ever *see* such shapeless feet as that girl has! All you read about peasants' feet is true." Her words sounded thin and hollow

in the silence which followed, as Harry looked at her blankly.

Later on, after they had left Gunhild at her little cabin in the valley and were approaching the hotel, Caroline suddenly broke out with a tremor of indignation in her voice. "It's perfectly outrageous—you're acting with cruel injustice. It's not fair to make everything so uncomfortable for me, to punish me for something I'm not in the least to blame for."

The young man came to himself with a start, and exclaimed with a polite and infinitely remote solicitude, "Why, Caroline, have I been rude? I beg your pardon. What have I done?"

The girl flushed angrily and cried out resentfully, "Now that's as unkind as the other. You know I'm not as clever as you in juggling with words and feelings, but it's not fair to just pass it all over as though there was nothing there, when you know you've given me a perfectly miserable day—as if it were my fault! It's small in you—it's *mean!* Oh, I can't say what I mean—and you know I can't, and



you're taking advantage of it, but you're not acting generously——"

Harry cut short her disjointed reproaches with a smooth coherence. "Dear Caroline, I'm sorry if I've offended you and I beg your pardon for it—but I don't in the least know what you are meaning."

They were standing outside the door now, the girl struggling with extreme fatigue and emotion, her breath coming in half-sobs like a tired child.

"Oh, you *do* know! It is ridiculous. It's too absurd to speak of—but as if it were *my* fault that I don't like sour milk, or as if it were fair to think anybody's feelings could be hurt by my saying I didn't."

At Harry's face of undisguised and unfeigned amazement she broke down completely, and crying out—"Oh, that's the last straw! To make me say it so—to make me so undignified, so ridiculous, so contemptible!" she fled into the house, weeping.

## VIII

### The Plains

**P**OLLIE sat on the edge of the bed and watched her sister brush the beautiful long hair she so admired. "What perfectly splendid hair you have, sister! Do you s'pose mine will ever grow so long and shiny? I think yours is every bit as pretty as Gunhild Larsen's."

"Did any one say it wasn't?" asked Caroline, beginning to coil the lustrous mass on the crown of her head.

"Why, no, of course not! I just thought of her because you and she are the only young ladies there are around here."

"Do you call her 'a young lady'?" This in an indifferent tone.

"Why, surely! Why not?"

"Oh, nothing! Only I was wondering whether

at home you'd call anybody a young lady who did washings for a living and milked the cows."

"Why, for goodness' sakes, that's so!" admitted Pollie in surprise. "I hadn't thought of that; things seem so different here somehow, don't they? So sort of topsy-turvy from the way they are at home?"

"Yes, they do rather," agreed her sister absently, and then with a little sharpness, "Aren't you dressed yet? Do hurry. We're late already."

After breakfast the beleaguered party, as they felt themselves, retreated into the sitting-room, endeavouring by means of a brisk fire in the big white stove to dispel a little of the moisture which hung heavily in the air, like a visible manifestation of their impatient *ennui*. Polly was frantic over her continued imprisonment. She wandered restlessly about, the fitful, destructive dashes of her progress followed with nervous apprehension by the others. Finally she turned from the window, and threw herself upon the invalid. "It's not raining now, Aunt

Nancy. Oh, please, Caroline, let me go and meet Gunhild. I haven't been out of doors in a hundred years."

"What do you think, Aunt Nancy?" asked Caroline doubtfully. "It's not raining just this instant, but I haven't any faith in Norwegian weather. Do you suppose it would be safe to let her go alone—you know Pollie!"

Miss Fox settled herself in luxurious abandon among the pillows. "My dear, I'm having a holiday," she announced. "It's almost worth an attack of sciatica to have a rest from deciding what will be safe for Pollie to do. No, you are her guardian, you know the road and I don't, and you share my knowledge of Pollie's capacity for getting into scrapes."

The child protested vigorously against this humorous arraignment by her old friend. "Oh, now, Aunt Nancy, aren't you mean! You know you can't expect a little girl to behave grown up, to be a young lady like sister and Gunhild—oh, only sister said this morning Gunhild's not a young lady

because she does the minister's washing. What is she, then?"

An angry red came to Caroline's cheeks, and she spoke with an unrestrained emphasis, "Mary Morton, how *can* you twist things so! I didn't mean it that way!"

Pollie retorted with her usual disconcerting openness. "I don't know about the way you meant it, but that was what you *said* anyhow—wasn't it, now?"

Harry interposed with one of the swift, sure movements by which he could so dexterously colour an incident to suit his fancy. He spoke with a hearty warmth, and an open, pleased look towards the girl, "Caroline is quite right. Gunhild is *not* a young lady. She is no more a young lady than the Venus of Milo, or Brunhilda. She's too big and good and pretty to look at, to be just a lady. Caroline has quite summed her up. Trust the fresh vision of the American girl to see things right."

"Oh!" cried Pollie, "I *see*! I didn't know sister meant it that way."

Caroline thought with an impatient surprise that she herself didn't know she meant it that way. Her hot suspicion that Harry was indulging himself in irony at her expense only burned the more that his face was the embodiment of pleased sincerity. She lost herself in a maze of conjecture as to just how far his subtlety did go, whether she might not be making a bugbear of a superhuman fineness of perception in him that existed only in her own mind, whether he might not be endowed after all with a large share of masculine simplicity and obtuseness of vision. And yet the very fact that in spite of a most concentrated attention, she was still unable to be sure whether his mind was really so much more flexible and nimble than hers, that she could only catch flitting glimpses of the workings of it, impressed her with an uneasy feeling of inferiority. The conception of a mind beside which her own was slow and matter-of-fact startled and alarmed her, and summoning her usual firm determination she dismissed it as a morbid fancy born of the monumental monotony of their sojourn in Naesvangen.

It was certainly the most tiresome spot in all the world. Travelling as they were with the lightest possible equipment, she found herself wholly without her usual occupation—no books, no music, no engagements, no people to see, nothing to look forward to or back upon. They were in as complete an isolation from the customary surroundings of their conventional life as if they were cast away on a desert island, and Caroline felt the acute helplessness of a modern soul robbed of all the paraphernalia of life and totally unused to dependence on its own resources. During the interminable rainy days her *ennui* rose at times to the dignity of actual suffering, and she felt that her self-control and usual sense of firm poise were being undermined by the unnatural conditions. It seemed incredible to her that they had been there but three weeks. An eternity rolled between her and her customary life of which she was so certainly mistress, and she felt a despairing doubt that release was ever coming.

At the beginning of this experience she had thought that she would enjoy much time with

Harry; but from the first an impalpable barrier had arisen between them, who before were such good comrades. She had blamed herself for it, feeling that it existed chiefly in her own pride—but it had seemed a sort of obsession. And now from a faint shadow in the sky it had grown to be a very thunder-cloud of hostility, blown together in a threatening mass by she knew not what perverse winds of misunderstanding and inarticulate, half-felt discord.

The man's sudden and fervent interest in the study of Norwegian was a further separation. He threw himself into the pleasure of acquiring a new language with all the trained and practised enthusiasm of an experienced linguist. His zest in this pursuit made the aimless listlessness of her own days the more intolerable. He and Pollie had already a sort of chatter, half-Norse, half-English, which amused them and their teacher vastly, but which naturally was quite unintelligible to an outsider. That, she suddenly said to herself with an impatient start, that was the whole trouble—she was the outsider. In some way, at the beginning she had



missed the clue, she had been too inflexible to follow the new lead and she was left behind, an experience as startling and new to her as it was mortifying. Her very native energy was a torment to her, condemned as she was to a perfect inaction. The room that morning was a symbol of the way in which this curious segment of their lives was passing. Miss Fox was playing a lagging game of solitaire, painfully reaching for the cards as they slipped away from her on the bedclothes. Harry sat at one window and Pollie at another, Pollie fidgeting impatiently, Harry answering idly her explosive exclamations, and both openly watching for the arrival of their teacher.

The rain began again suddenly in a steady deluge, which blotted out what misty view of the landscape had been visible before. It was like the crashing chord which ends an adagio movement in a minor key and begins a stirring march, for the door opened and Gunhild appeared, flashing her wide smile at them all as she shook the drops from her shining hair. It was as though a reassuring high call had

sounded over a dispirited camp, so instant was the movement of relieved welcome towards her. "Homesick for America, ain't you?" she cried to Pollie, tossing her high in the air with a vigorous gesture. "Do you know I'm such a selfish pig I'm just glad it's still 'ugly weather' as we call it here, for if the sun shone I should have to do such a big washing for the minister and that'd mean no lessons for several days and I'd forget all my English again. And that makes me think—it's coming back to me more and more, not just Architect Pettersen's book English but real, sure-enough Kansas American talk that I'd 'most forgotten. I woke up in the night and thought of a new thing that had clean gone out of my mind. I won't tell you what it is, but the first time it comes in handy I'll spring it on you and see how surprised you'll be!"

She dropped down in a chair, still holding Pollie, who exclaimed petulantly. "Why can't the minister wait for his old washing! He has all the year round and we will be going so soon. Aunt Nancy's 'most well."

"He *is* waiting—poor old dear—and he'll have to keep on a-waiting till we get some sunshine again. But he's awfully mad at the weather. He wants to have everything fresh and clean, when his son, Lieutenant Olaf, and his fashionable wife and his fine friends from Christiania come back to visit. I'll have to wash everything in the house and clean the windows besides."

Miss Fox spoke with a sudden rush of interest, "There! That's one thing I've been forgetting to ask you, Gunhild. How *are* the windows in Norway kept so clean? I've never seen one that doesn't shine like a diamond."

The girl laughed. "It's the simplest thing in the world. Anybody can do it. All you have to do is to live in western Norway. We never have a grain of dust, and the rain washes the glass for us two or three times every day. My! I remember how my poor mother used to kill herself trying to keep the windows clean in dry, dusty western Kansas. But who cares for dirty windows when the sun shines!"

*"Does the sun ever shine, anywhere?"* inquired Harry plaintively.

Gunhild opened her mouth to speak, laughed aloud delightedly like a child, tried to speak again, and again interrupted herself by a shout of mirth. Finally she cried, "Sure Mike, the sun shines—in Kansas always. There! that's what I remembered last night, that 'sure Mike,' but I didn't suppose I'd have a chance to use it so soon. Don't it sound American—'Sure Mike!' " She laughed again and swung Pollie up in a movement of overflowing delight.

The child joined her high treble to the thick obscure laugh of the other and cried out, "Why, I'm an American and I never heard that. Isn't it lovely! 'Sure Mike the sun shines'! Sure Mike but I like that!"

Harry glanced apprehensively at Caroline, and away with relief as she did not raise her head from the book she was reading. Then meeting his aunt's twinkling eyes, he, too, broke out into open amusement.

Gunhild was charmed with the success of her new phrase. "I knew you'd recognise it and like it," she said, "and to think of my being able to teach a little American girl English! And it's true all the same what I said about the sun. It's shining this very minute on the little wooden house with the sheet-iron roof that used to get so hot over the little attic where I slept—or rather where I didn't sleep."

"Did the heat keep you awake?" asked Miss Fox.

"No indeed!" returned Gunhild mysteriously, looking at Pollie, who instantly scented a story.

"Oh, there, Gunhild, you've never told me a single, single story about when you were a little girl. There must be lots—tell me one now. How did you sleep?"

They settled into their usual attitudes during stories, Pollie's head on Gunhild's shoulder, her dark eyes fixed on the other's face. "Well, if you'll promise never to be as naughty as I was, I'll tell you what I used to do when I was littler than you are now. I was the only child, you know—my own mother's only child, that is—and I didn't have a

mother very long, so there wasn't anybody up there to watch me. All summer long—from early in the spring till late in the fall—I slept outdoors on the sod roof of the lean-to. If I live to be a hundred years old I'll never forget the first night I crept out of the window and slept so, under the stars. I felt small, so small in all that empty prairie with all that great sky over me, and yet so happy." She was looking down at the child in her arms and did not see Harry's quick, startled glance. "I don't believe you have any idea how many stars there are in a Kansas sky—so many, so many, that a little girl could never count them all, even if she stayed awake all night to do it. Here in winter, even when it's clear, we can only see a little winding river of stars between the black mountains, but there it's a regular ocean of them!"

Pollie sighed. "I never am allowed to do such interesting things."

"Neither was I allowed! Nobody knew about it. They were too busy to bother about me. I used to have all the long days to myself to play in the corn.

It was like a forest of big trees to me—just as tall, so it seems to me now.” Polly sat up, all resentful envy of such bliss. “Didn’t you *ever* have to do anything horrid, like going to dancing school, or learning French?”

Gunhild shook her head. “No, I was always that *lucky!* Even in winter, when I went to school, that didn’t seem like work, we had such a lovely teacher. She was so sweet. It was through her that I went to college. *Aha!* I just bet you didn’t know I was a college girl, like Miss Morton, too.” She smiled in an innocent pride at their surprise. “Yes, Miss Robinson—she was the teacher—she helped me and I went clear east to Lawrence, Kansas, and studied for six months in the State University there—until my father took sick and I had to go back.”

“Oh, tell me that story!” demanded Pollie. “Somehow I always supposed you never had to go to school.”

“Hard on me, you are! Am I *that* ignorant? Why, yes, sure I went to college, and I had an awfully good time, though even there I was home-

sick for the prairies. Lawrence isn't on the plains, you know. Why, the State University stands on a real hill—at least it looked like a hill to me, then when I was used to just lovely broad prairies, where you're always in the middle of a circle, no matter how far you go."

"I know the University of Kansas," broke in Harry suddenly. "Why, yes. I'd almost forgotten, but I visited Lawrence once, that year I was in the West. A man who studied with me in Leipzig is professor there."

"I was in a professor's family, too," paralleled Gunhild. "Miss Robinson got me a place to work for my board with the kindest folks. He was a Kansas man—the professor—but she came from Massachusetts. I never could get used to the queer way she talked, but she taught me a lot of things. She didn't like it in Lawrence very well. It was the first time she'd been away from Massachusetts. She'd been a school-teacher before she married the professor. That's what I wanted to be, too."



"I wish I could go to school to you," cried Pollie.  
"I wouldn't hate it so then."

"Ah, it wasn't for pretty little girls like you—my teaching. I had a plan—I had a plan."

She sighed, fell into a silence, and then putting Pollie gently out of her lap, she walked over to the window and stood looking absently out. Apparently she had forgotten she was not alone, for when Miss Fox spoke to her she came to herself with a start. "What plan? Oh, I'm ashamed to speak of it. Things have turned out so different from what I hoped. It would sound so ridiculous for an ignorant thing like me even to *say* what I had in my mind." She glanced timidly at Caroline as if divining hostility in the silence with which the American girl received her naïve autobiography. "I don't know anything, you see. I've forgotten even what little I did learn, being here, so far away from anybody who's educated." She pronounced the word with a true American reverence for the process. "I'm afraid I must seem awfully bold to talk right out the way I do about everything." She

stopped, looking at Caroline with a shy but obvious appeal for some sign of indulgence.

The American girl wished to give it, her generosity was touched by the other's humility, but some strange inward barrier held her silent. She told herself that Harry would think she was feigning a sympathy she did not feel in order to win his approval, and she quivered with resentment to find herself thinking of him in the matter at all. While she was struggling the moment for action passed. Gunhild turned to the door with a serious face, remarked soberly that this was not learning Norwegian, and the three students disappeared.

Caroline continued reading her book and Miss Fox resumed her scattered game of solitaire. The room was very quiet, the steady pouring of the rain being the only sound. Finally the old lady laid down the last card with a little sigh of triumph and looked over at the girl for felicitations on her success. She was struck with her attitude of languid despondency. Her book lay open on her lap but her

eyes were fixed on the floor with an expression almost tragic. Miss Fox exclaimed in dismay, "Why, Caroline, my dear little Carrie! What's the matter?"

The girl started, glanced at the invalid for an instant, and turned away. "Nothing," she said coldly.

"But you look so sad, my poor dear. You don't look well! Is something troubling you? Oh, I'm bitterly unreconciled that I've kept you here in this dull place so long! I don't believe Harry has done his duty by you. You've been bored almost to death."

At the mention of the man's name, although her face did not change its set expression of neutrality, a slow flush burned itself up to the roots of her hair. Miss Fox heaved a sigh of relief at this signal, and the anxious lines in her face smoothed themselves out into a contented smile.

"Come here a minute, Caroline," she commanded.

The girl went to the bed and relinquished her hands into the warm grasp of her old friend, although she kept her face obstinately averted. She

suffered openly under the penetrating scrutiny of the other's sharp eyes.

Miss Fox pulled her down till she could speak in a low tone. "It's all right, my dear," she said with a gallant and reassuring smile. "It's quite as it should be."

Caroline's lips trembled. "Oh, *you* don't know," she said in a low-voiced burst of impatience. "You don't understand."

The old lady smiled and wagged her head on the pillows. "No, of course, it's always new and different—but I can guess a little—and let me tell you again that it's all——"

At this the girl pulled her hands away in despairing exasperation, cried out with a break in her voice, "Oh, *please* don't!" and left the room precipitately.

Immediately outside the door in the darkened corridor she encountered the rest of the party. "What's the hurry, sister?" shouted Pollie. "Goodness, think of anybody hurrying anywhere in Norway! Come on, we're moving from the front room down into the dining-room so's to be sure and see

Ingolf when he passes. Gunhild's afraid he'll go out on the fjord to-day, and he has a cold——"

Caroline looked about her, distraught for an escape, but Pollie with her usual cheerful obtuseness clung to her like a little limpet, and went on insistently, "Oh, Gunhild's been telling us what her 'plan' was she spoke about in Aunt Nancy's room. Harry just screwed it out of her in little squinchy pieces—and it's the grandest idea you ever heard of."

Gunhild looked deprecatingly at the other girl, who put her hand to her throat and tried to smile. "I'd like to hear it, Gunhild," she said, as they established themselves in the dining-room. Although she spoke gently, the Norwegian was thrown into a panic at the idea, and confounded herself with incoherent protestations that she hadn't meant to talk about it at all, that Mr. Fox had made her, that she wasn't fit——

In the end it was Harry who lent his smooth fluency, and laid before Caroline the idea of a movement of enlightenment among the immigrant Scan-

dinavian and Finnish farmers of the plains. Gunhild had said schools but she meant something vastly more significant—the supplying of the information those people really needed—how to care for their babies under the wholly different conditions: how to change their methods of agriculture to avoid the terrible and fatal mistakes of the first few years in a world so diametrically opposite to their old home: how to adapt themselves to their Scandinavian-American children so that there would not be the tragic gulf between the parent and the child—his voice ran on and on, while Caroline heard it dimly from a distance.

As he stopped she drew a long breath, clasped her hands together tightly, and smiled with a penetrating sweetness on Gunhild. “I see just how nobody but you could have thought of it, dear Gunhild,” she said warmly. “You didn’t call it by that name but really you’d hit on the same idea for your Norwegian farmers as the best people in all the world have in what they call ‘University Settlements.’ It’s curious that nobody ever thought be-

fore that was needed as much in country as in city places—to show people by example what a fine thing even a very poor life can be.”

As she finished, her eyes were suffused and shining. She felt very happy. For the first time in long days she felt herself free of a curious spell of perversity which made her act unworthily of her customary pride in her magnanimity, made her act like the kind of woman she had always despised, the small, petty, so-called “feminine” woman. Gunhild’s little outcry of pleasure and gratitude seemed infinitely touching to her.

This triumphant return to her old estate was cut short by Harry’s approving and relieved exclamations. He too seemed thankful to her, quite openly so, and the meaning of his gratitude for a kindness done to Gunhild precipitated Caroline again into the resentful and surprised irritation from which she had just rescued herself.

“That’s kind of you, Caroline—that’s like you—to understand so,” he had exclaimed, and Gunhild went on exclaiming, “Yes, isn’t that sweet—Oh, I’m

so glad you think it's a good scheme, even if I can't do anything about it. Perhaps Mr. Fox, though, could? He owns so much land there and has so much money. Maybe he could get somebody to help the people on his land and neighbouring it. Of course he couldn't want to do it himself. It would be too tiresome to anybody who didn't have some reason to love the people—but he could get somebody perhaps——?”

For a moment Harry made no answer to the implied question, although he was looking directly into the girl's eyes. He seemed about to speak several times, and Caroline listened with a strained fascination to hear what he would say.

Finally, “Well, perhaps I will,” he said, hesitating. “Who knows? Perhaps I will!”



## IX

### **An Arrival**

**F**OR the next few days an open constraint reigned in the little circle which thus far had kept at least an appearance of happy intimacy. The man of the party was silent and abstracted, smoking many solitary cigars and passing many hours in meditation on the wooden balcony of his room. The young lady withdrew herself into so forbidding a fortress of silence that even the dauntless Pollie dared make no effort to storm its walls. Gunhild was occupied steadily at the minister's house, and only came to the hotel to give Harry and Pollie their Norwegian lessons.

Miss Fox sat securely in her watch-tower on the bed, noted the unusual condition of affairs with shrewd, keen eyes, and congratulated herself that all was going well; philosophising as she kept Pollie amused, and left the others to their own devices.

"Nothing," she assured herself, "nothing is so discouraging to an experienced matchmaker as too long a continuance of easy and familiar intercourse. As long as they are cheerful and just enjoy each other's society, you can't be sure of having accomplished a thing; but when the man begins to be silent and to think long and hard, and the girl to be unhappy and afraid, one's labours are almost over."

She improved slowly but steadily. As she had said, she knew exactly what weapons to use against her old malady and little by little the drawn look of pain left her face. One afternoon she announced to Pollie, her attendant in these days of solitary reveries on the part of the two older ones, that she was quite sure she was able to get up for a few minutes and vary the monotony of convalescence by lying on the sofa. Pollie was beside herself with delight at being allowed to help her, and with willing little fingers she contrived to twist every garment as she put it on, to button every button in the wrong hole and to hook every hook in the wrong eye. Some-

what exhausted from the strain of such zealous assistance, Miss Fox lay back on the sofa and told her little nurse to go and call her sister and Harry to see a surprise. The child was enchanted and darted like a dragon-fly down the dusky corridor. At the turning she was seized in a pair of tweed-covered masculine arms and given "a hug like one of Harry's own, before he got so queer and grumpy." "Oh, Harry!" she gasped, "you must go right into Aunt Nancy's room and see what a surprise we have for you," and then with a characteristic incapacity to keep a secret she streamed on, "Aunt Nancy's up and has a wrapper on and is lying on the sofa."

"So you have a surprise for me? Well, I have one for you, little chatter-box—who do you think is holding you?"

Pollie screwed herself around with wide, amazed eyes. "*Why, why, why!* if it's not Mr. Campbell! however in the world did you get *here?*"

"Dear me! I've as good a right here as you have! Norway is just our second home—we Eng-

lish. How did *you* get here? And where's Miss Fox? And—your sister?"

"They're both in their rooms and won't they be just tickled to pieces to see you. We're having an awfully slow time. Aunt Nancy has had an awful attack of sciatica and we had to stop and nurse her right where we were, which was here. We've been here a perfect age—'most since we left England, and the last week has been something fierce. I never thought a place could be so slow. And everybody's got nerves—and it rains! it rains!—but I'm learning Norwegian with Gunhild, and she is splendid! I love her as much as I do you."

Towards the end of the torrent she began pulling the big Englishman impetuously down the hall, and she now thrust him into Miss Fox's room without the formality of a knock.

The invalid was still exclaiming in amazement when Pollie returned, dragging Caroline. Miss Fox was surprised at the sudden and unexpected warmth of her greeting to the man she had left so coldly. She exclaimed in an astonishment as

pleased as it was profound,—there could be no doubt of her welcome,—“Why, Mr. Campbell, what amazing good fortune brings you here? I can hardly believe my eyes. You don’t know how extremely glad I am to see you!” She spoke in her sunniest, heartiest manner, so like her father that Miss Fox was startled. That side of Caroline had been under a cloud for some time.

She put out her hand with a swift gesture of friendliness and the Englishman took it between both of his, blushing and stammering like a boy in his delight. His joy at seeing the girl again was so open and heartfelt that Miss Fox turned her eyes away. “It’s not decent to surprise anybody looking his very heart out of his eyes that way,” she told herself with a passing premonition of misery ahead for the single-hearted lover.

He was so breathless and overcome with pleasure at his welcome that his explanation of his presence in Naesvangen was somewhat incoherent. They gathered a vague notion that he had heard of the place as one of the few in western Norway where

English fishermen had not penetrated, and had been seized with a sudden fancy to try the river for salmon.

“How did you know that there *was* a river, if you didn’t know anything about it?” asked Pollie, the disconcerting.

“Have you been in Norway all this time and don’t know yet that there’s *always* a river? What do you suppose happens to all the rain that falls? It can’t soak very deep into solid rock, can it? And you a Yankee!”

He caught the little girl up, held her close for a moment and then set her on his knee, his serene eyes melting into tenderness as he looked at her. “What luck to find my little pal here!” he said.

“Well, I never was so glad to see anybody as I was you—only I *didn’t* see you at first. Aunt Nancy, I thought Mr. Campbell was Harry when I ran into him. His sleeves felt just the same.”

Miss Fox laughed. “You made a mistake in your animal, didn’t you?” Pollie stared for a moment and then joined in her sister’s laugh at the

mild joke. The Englishman laughed with them, but a little blankly. His eyes were absent and evidently his thoughts were elsewhere.

At this point Harry came in and greeted the newcomer with his usual tact and graceful self-possession. Miss Fox admired the impassive way in which he received so unexpected an interruption to his monopoly of Caroline. The humorous old observer of the game of human life was vastly interested by the appearance of a new pawn on her board. "If something doesn't happen *now*——" she said with one of her inward smiles as she watched the little scene before her.

Campbell, broad-shouldered and massive, held Pollie with one strong hand and pulled with the other at the drooping moustache whose downward curve gave a sad expression to his face, contradicted by the steady calm of his honest eyes. Just at that moment his eyes were openly adoring, as he listened to Caroline's clear, penetrating voice relating their experiences and watched the animated play of expression on her sparkling face. "When Caroline's

in that mood, nobody can resist her," thought the onlooker, and glanced at her nephew to see how this shifting of position affected him. He had risen from his chair and was standing by the window with his back turned to the little group of talkers. From the sofa his aunt could see his dark, moody face and brooding, absent eyes as he gazed fixedly up at the mountain opposite them. She settled herself in her pillows, with a satisfied sigh. "Nothing could be going better," she congratulated herself. "By special good fortune, the one thing necessary to decide matters has been sent me. The coffee was made and now the hand of Providence has provided the egg-shell and the cold water to settle it. If I can't pour out a clear cupful before long to present to Caroline's father I'm a much mistaken old woman."

She turned back to the others, found Campbell floundering in inarticulate excuses for staying on at the same hotel now that he had found them there, and interposed with the warmest of invitations to join their party. "There are a lot of interesting



things to do here, I'm sure, if we do but hunt them up. A peasant girl, who has been very kind to us, has spoken of a stone church which has a number of legends about it. It's one of the oldest in Norway. I think it would be good fun to explore an unknown bit like this rather than roll along the beaten track which you know so well already. I'll soon be myself enough to take short trips with you. We should be able quite to enjoy ourselves and get some reward for the frightfully tiresome experience I've given these poor young people." Caroline echoed this invitation with her frankest, kindest smile and Pollie was boisterous in her enthusiasm. Again Miss Fox was moved to admiration of the way in which Harry "so exactly," as she told herself, "came to the scratch."

Nothing could have been more cordial, more hearty, more openly and almost too obviously sincere, than his pleased acceptance of the inevitable.

The Englishman radiated joy at all this friendly warmth. "Why, ha! ha!—I couldn't ask anything better, don't you know," he said with the restrained

moderation which was his nearest approach to verbal enthusiasm. "It's just what I might have wished, you know."

Indeed, that evening alone with Miss Fox and her nephew he confessed with the greatest frankness that it was exactly what he had planned for. In the clear, colourless late evening he went for a walk with Caroline, and on his return, the girl having disappeared at once, he sought out the American and his aunt sitting alone in the latter's room.

"May I come in for a moment?" he asked gravely. "I have something I wish to say, a question I wish to ask."

And then with an honest and courageous directness which was almost like a physical blow to his two listeners, used as they were to silent understandings and unspoken agreements, he launched the thunderbolt which was to clear the sultry air.

"I hope you won't think it impertinent or intrusive; I only do it so that I may know where I stand. Would you be willing to tell me if there is still a chance for me with Miss Morton? Or if there is

an engagement or understanding between her and Mr. Fox?"

Even as she caught her breath in amazement at this sudden point-blank explosion in her carefully guarded atmosphere, Miss Fox's active old brain saw in it the possibilities for the advancement of her plan. "Strange!" she thought, "how these childish people often stumble on simple methods so much better than the most delicately balanced schemes." Affairs had progressed to a point where a vigorous blow was the only thing necessary, and she had not recognised the crisis until an outsider had done the right thing—she had missed the crucial moment, though she rejoiced that a friendly Fate had supplied her omission. The complicated and meditative Harry would needs be stirred to decision. For once in his life he was finding himself in a position where there were no possible shadings, where none of his skill in manipulating half-tones would avail him, where he must cross a Rubicon and leave no bridge behind him. With these meditations whirling through her mind, she did not venture to look at her

nephew. The serious man before them was going on with his explanation, the life-and-death sincerity of his halting words giving them a touching dignity.

"I don't wish to sail under false colours, you know. I really knew quite well you were here. That's why I came over to Norway as soon as you left England, hoping to meet you somewhere, and I learned from your bankers in Bergen where you were. I know I was taking a liberty in coming, but if I'm honest about it I hope you won't mind. I really couldn't help it—I—I find I can't think of anything but Miss Morton—and I couldn't stay away. But of course if she is not free—if there is some understanding—you seem so like one family—I will go away. But if there's still a chance for me I—I mean to stay. I'm sure Mr. Fox as a fellow Anglo-Saxon will bear me no grudge as an honest rival."

During this speech Miss Fox felt a penetrating sense of guilt. She was moved from her part of disinterested observer, whence she had cheerfully

sacrificed a pawn for the sake of a brilliant move in the game, to a great sympathy and admiration for the man who stood so honestly putting himself at their mercy and as she expressed it, "playing so open a hand." Her own generosity rose to meet his to a painful degree. She wished Harry would speak quickly and end the suspense, and she felt grateful for her certainty that since the fatal thrust must be given her nephew could make the blow swift and as painless as possible, phrasing tactfully the vague and indefinite, but by no means uncertain condition of things. Even in the midst of her shuddering reluctance to hurt the helpless victim before them, she was conscious of a little curiosity herself to know exactly where her two charges were, to hear her acute observation corroborated. She turned to her nephew with the tranquil brow which always hid her emotions. "It is for you to speak, Harry," she said, and awaited his answer in all confident expectation.

Harry spoke with as blunt and straightforward a sincerity as the other man had used. "Why, no,

Campbell, for your sake, I'm glad to say that there is not the shadow of an understanding between us. There never has been. We are almost like brother and sister. You noticed it yourself, when you said we seem like one family. Caroline and Pollie feel that Miss Fox is as much their aunt as mine. No, I can set your mind completely at rest on that score—though I suppose it was natural enough for you to have the thought. And as for your chance with her, I assure you, you have a very good chance indeed! I know of nobody she seems to like better. She spoke so very warmly to me about your turning up here."

This remarkable speech was delivered with the most admirable openness and unconstrained ease. At the end he put out his slim brown hand to the Englishman, who wrung it hard in speechless gratitude. His relief seemed to render him entirely inarticulate. He could only murmur broken phrases of delight, and exclaim "Thank you. Oh, *thank* you!" as he shook hands first with Miss Fox and then again with Harry at the door. His very

footsteps retreating down the corridor were unsteady, as though he were still staggered with emotion.

The young man turned and faced his aunt gravely. He drew a chair up beside her sofa, took her hand in his, and was silent for a moment. The room seemed suddenly to have darkened. The invalid nerved herself for a battle in which she meant with all her most concentrated resolution to come off victor. She consciously pitted her experience, her will-power, and above all the force of a rarely-aroused powerful personality, against his subtlety and charm.

"We shall see if he can stick to that amazing statement," she said to herself hotly. "I am ashamed of my own nephew! A pretty figure he cuts with his evasions, beside Campbell!" The bald truth of Harry's speech to the Englishman was a barrier which resisted not an instant her determination to go to the heart of the matter. The man could not shelter himself behind any such superficial appearance of actuality, no matter how polished and dense

he might make it seem. He was fighting with an expert in his own weapons. Reserving herself warily, she waited for the opening attack.

Harry began to speak in his most penetratingly tender tones: "Dear Aunt Nancy—my hero-father's sister, my second mother—all this gives me an opportunity for which I have been waiting. I come to you as I always have, since I was a little, unhappy boy, sure of your sympathy and comprehension. I need your help."

He paused and raised her hands to his lips. Miss Fox steeled herself against the well-nigh irresistible rush of her affection. She reminded herself sternly that for the moment there was war between them. "Well, what is it, Harry?" she asked drily.

"You know how restless and uneasy I've been of late—miserable in the life I'm leading and yet not knowing any other that would be better——" The woman interrupted with a swift thrust through an opening in his careful guard, "I have indeed known that, Harry, and I've seen the escape from it close at hand. You have certainly made me think that you



were turning to America as the place for you, and that with Car——”

The young man executed a parry exactly in time to send her thrust harmlessly beyond him. With a slight touch of un-English ceremony in his manner and speech, like one wishing to treat worthily a serious and elevated matter, he went on, still holding her hand firmly. “You are right, dear aunt. I have been looking to America for my regeneration, to my father’s America, to the lands in the West which my mother and I have so neglected. I have been dreaming of a free, unconventional life—really human, such as I have never known, and can even now but faintly conceive: a life where I can use all my energies in activity that will be beneficent, and where success will not mean trampling upon other men.

“I do not wish to go alone into that solitude——” He paused and Miss Fox felt her ears ringing in an air which seemed to have lost all its vitality. He finished with a grave dignity, fixing his dark eyes upon his listener’s face. “To put the matter briefly,

I'm thinking of marrying Gunhild Larsen and going to live with her in the West."

He stopped short. His last words reverberated in a portentous silence. His aunt looked at him with a face idiotically blank of all expression. When she finally spoke it was thickly: "Harry, I don't think I understood what you said just now."

"I think you did perfectly, dear aunt," returned the young man gently, "but you are naturally very much surprised. I am surprised myself—and indeed my decision is by no means irrevocable. But I have seen—I cannot help seeing constantly—what a noble, beautiful woman she is, quite in an antique mould of large and generous impulses. She loves that life as I love it—or as I feel I could; she would never feel the need of the foolish superfluities of modern existence. She would be supremely happy doing good to her countrymen, and as for me—she would make a man of me. Her very simplicity would be my chiefest guard against the sickly complication which I have contracted like a disease from my unnatural life. We would never come in con-

tact with the conventional world where she might not perhaps be at ease." He gathered confidence from his opponent's continued silence and was going on with a tremor of feeling in his voice, "Think what a life! To ride over the plains by day, and sleep under the stars at night with a woman who——"

Miss Fox suddenly broke from the spell of astounded petrification with a whirlwind of words. She snatched her hand away, and confronted the man with burning eyes. "Harry, I haven't been able to believe my ears! *Never* did I hear such absurd, such utterly ludicrous, such *boyish*, nonsense! You must have taken leave of your senses."

Harry answered with a steady self-control. "Aunt Nancy, don't say anything you will regret. I have come to you with a serious question—so far certainly the most serious I've ever faced. It will be the first time in my life that you have failed me if you will not listen to me."

It was an irresistible appeal, but the old woman resisted it. "Harry—my dear Harry—listen to you?"

Always, when you talk possibilities. But there are limits even to my endurance. My brain absolutely whirls. I must put the whole matter out of my mind—forget you have said it, or I shall go insane from amazement.”

“Will you tell me what there is so utterly astounding in my proposing to marry a good and beautiful woman and go to live in my native country—a thing you yourself have urged me a thousand times to do?”

“I hope you don’t expect me to reason with you—to try and convince you by arguments of—I suppose you fancy that I should receive calmly your proposal to marry an ex-cook and present washwoman—a peasant from the fields, a dairymaid smelling of the cow-stable, whose experience of America has been limited to the company of railroad workmen and cowboys. Oh, I’m in a bad dream!”

For the first time the man’s face flushed angrily and he spoke with furious emphasis. “I never knew before that you were the frankest kind of a snob, Aunt Nancy. I thought you were above considera-

tions like that. You've always apparently tried to teach me to be. I thought we were Americans and could marry whom we chose."

"Oh, Americans!" cried his aunt, returning his angry outburst with a fiercer flame of violence, "you ninny! you sentimentalist! You've no more idea about America—you and your foolish Utopian ideas about our democracy! What do you know of conditions there? It's a book-America you fancy up out of nothing. Good Heavens! We are a civilised people like other nations. Americans don't marry their cooks any more than other gentlemen."

Harry opened his lips to speak, but starting from his chair he went to the window and looked up at the mountain opposite in a heavy-breathing silence. When he returned to his seat he spoke with a resolute calm which imposed itself upon the agitated woman. "You can take your choice, Aunt Nancy. Either I shall not say another word about it, or we shall both act like reasoning beings. It is preposterous to be so violent—both of us."

His aunt turned her head and fixed him with

glittering eyes. "I can be exactly as reasonable as you are, Harry. I think I can control myself now, no matter what you say."

And indeed, in the long and exhausting altercation which followed, she felt herself again her own mistress. Although she was strained to the highest pitch of nervous tension and brought desperately into play every resource experience had taught her, there was no zest for her in the struggle. It was too ghastly a life-and-death matter. She felt that to miss a point anywhere would be fatal. Not until she saw a thrust go home and her opponent wince did she draw a free breath and tell herself that she had found the right weapon. From that instant she abandoned other modes of assault and overwhelmed her adversary with blow upon blow from that formidable and poisoned blade.

Circling vainly about his apparently invincible defence and trying one after another of the most widely varied attacks, she had exclaimed, "Will you at least have the sense to try and imagine your mother's face when your wife first exclaims in her

presence 'You betcher life,' or entertains the guests with an account of her method of doing washings for a living?" And she had almost cried aloud with thankfulness to see the man's face darken in silence.

She took heart of grace; she saw a possible way out of the nightmare about her, and setting herself firmly on this vantage ground she did not allow her opponent to draw her away or to place any distance between himself and the small, coldly compelling, and implacable figure that was his sister-in-law.

Again and again she brought him back from some romantic and fervent outburst to the vision of the endless, bitter warfare with an unconquerable enemy which would be involved in carrying out his plan. "It is always the woman who wins in the end," she told him, "when the woman is like your mother."

She varied this attack with excursions into his own territory. "Harry, you are blind; you don't see how hopelessly ignorant and common she appears. Her very beauty has no distinction—her

speech is compact of vulgarisms. It's not as if she spoke with ever so bad a foreign accent—it's a thousand times worse. Her fluency is the fatal thing;" but she always returned with a dirge-like insistence to his knowledge from past experience of how finely and indomitably relentless his mother could be. And back of that small, terrifying personality was massed all the world. Without exception all the world he had known up to that time was against him.

To that gigantic barrier, he opposed Gunhild's beauty and her sweet and noble simplicity. His aunt retorted with a restrained scorn that he was suffering from a common enough temporary infatuation with a good-looking girl of the people—a sort of reaction from his too highly refined and neutralised world,—“though I *had* thought,” she cried angrily, “that your reaction would take another course less like that of an insane man.”

He reminded her of her own outspoken admiration for Gunhild's character, and she returned that there was such a thing as suitability in the world—



that a character suited for a peasant would be out of place in a salon. Harry assured her with bitter emphasis that he was sick of salons, and the very fact that purity and devotion were out of place in them was reason enough to abjure them.

His aunt riposted sharply, "Abjure them? You can't! It's too late—you can't, any more than the air you breathe. This is only a temporary fit of belated boyish infatuation. Because she wears a red bodice and beaded stomacher and does her hair like the pictures of Brunhilda you fancy you are the hero of a sentimental, boarding-school novel and she the heroine. It all comes from a false picturesqueness, because we are all out of our frames and she is in hers. Why, her very name that sounds so suggestive to you is as common here, so she tells me, as Mary Ann Jones."

"Good Heavens, Aunt Nancy, what pettiness! Are you blind to her nobility, to her supreme goodness——"

"She has a beautiful body—yes—and for purposes of argument I grant you that she has a beauti-

ful soul as well, but can you live on that—you with your brain? You would be bored to extinction in three months. You are the product of a world of infinite half-shadings and subtleties of grey matter. Harry, this is no time for mincing matters. I saw your father ruin his life by a miserable, unsuitable marriage—don't take me through that hell again. His one weakness was his complete yielding to the woman he loved, who was not, for all her high birth, worthy of his faintest thought."

"And yet you're holding her up to me as a force one must yield to."

"I am but using her to symbolise all the world which is irrevocably yours—the world which is in you as well as outside—the world whose contemptuous amusement at your folly you could not endure." She fancied she saw him falter and give back, and although she was almost at the end of her strength she redoubled her efforts, pouring out her very soul in impassioned entreaty and remonstrance.

When Harry at last gave a tired gesture of listless dismissal of the subject and rose to go, she felt that

she had gone to the extreme limit of her powers, that she was utterly exhausted, but that she had carried the day. He had not, it is true, said in so many words that he recognised the impossibility of his plan—"like the cheapest sort of sentimental melodrama," she told him scornfully, in surprise at his yielding to an impulse of so little distinction; but she knew every turn of his mental processes so well that she could follow with perfect exactitude the overwhelming avalanche of hesitations and doubts which she had laboured so to launch upon him. The reaction had set in, she recognised it with a weary relief—the reaction inevitable in a nature so complex.

It was not until toward the end of the wakeful vigil of pain to which he left her that she suddenly realised that after all Harry had scored a victory on his side. For one thing, thus far he had been extraordinarily successful in concealing from her all traces of this new idea. She admitted frankly to herself that in the tumult of her emotions there was an unmistakable element of chagrin that her trusted

shrewdness and keen observation had been so utterly at fault; that she should have misinterpreted absolutely the facts of the case.

Besides this, he had so startled her by his unexpected move she had forgotten entirely the cause she had meant to forward. They had talked for four interminable hours and not a mention had been made of Caroline Morton. For an instant she entertained the hypothesis that it was with this end in view that Harry had acted. She was lost in disinterested admiration of this masterly flanking movement. "Upon my word, I do believe he could get around his mother!" she exclaimed, and felt that praise could go no further.

But the reality of his appeal came flooding over her. She remembered his eager eyes as he spoke of his love for his father's life, his vibrating voice as he cried out upon the sick artificiality of his mother's, the likeness to her brother always so strong and at this time so startlingly like his father when he too was ardent and young—detail after detail came to her with a certainty of his sincerity.

She forgot Caroline—she remembered her own visionary and unhappy youth. No, Harry was no Machiavelli, he was his father's son. As she finally dropped to sleep, worn out by emotion, her heart was very tender towards the nephew who was like a son. "He is a dear lad—a dear, misguided, simple-minded lad, as his father was before him. Under all the veneer of his mother's training he has his father's great child-heart. And it is his father's old sister who shall keep him from ruining his life for a foolish fancy."

## X

### The Old Church

**I**T was a great day for the sojourners in Naesvangen. For one thing the sun was shining brightly and the air was warm and dry. The fields were bright with haymakers in red bodices, hanging up long wisps of grass to dry on the interminable hay-racks, which stretched everywhere like thin green hedges. For once every wisp of cloud was burned away from the mountain tops. Their bare, grey, rocky crests stood cutting sharply against an intensely blue sky. The air was fragrant with the mixture of perfumes peculiar to Norwegian summers when everything must needs blossom and ripen at once; the delicate spring-like odour of wild roses and syringas mingling with the strong midsummer odour of elder-berry blossoms and ripe raspberries and the pervading, penetrating sweetness of freshly

cut hay, which was so heavy that it was almost like an intoxicant.

Apparently it had that effect upon the little American girl, for she was almost beside herself with delighted excitement, darting about in front of the hotel with the aimless and unsettling dashes of a runaway drop of quicksilver. She poured forth a steady stream of enthusiastic exclamations, "Oh, *isn't* it the loveliest day! And *doesn't* it seem too good to be true to have the sun shining! And *aren't* we lucky to have such weather for Aunt Nancy's first outing!"

A cariole waited before the door, a vehicle from another century, with a strangely curving spoon-like seat for a single occupant. Kaptejn Rivedal walked around and around this antiquated creation, inspecting it and the chubby, thick-necked horse with an air of great satisfaction and pride. Mr. Campbell, a broad smile on his handsome face, was disposing a steamer rug over the seat. Miss Morton came to the door to see if everything was ready and waved her hand back into the house. The little

group of friendly, watching peasant children craned their necks, and every one looked towards the door. A slow, dragging step was heard and Miss Fox appeared, leaning heavily on her nephew's arm, Gunhild laden with wraps in the background.

At the sight of all the faces turned to watch her progress, the invalid stopped short and laughed, her old ringing laugh which had been silent so long. "At last I know the emotions of the bride as she goes up the aisle with every one staring at her," she declared. "There only needs an organ 'Tum! tum-titum!' and ushers walking stiff-legged ahead of me." She broke off and threw up her head with a gesture of amazed and inspirited delight. "Oh, what a glorious spot! What sunshine! What a superb valley! The idea of your calling this a gloomy place!"

They cried out at this, and Harry said, "It's only just celebrating for you. For us it has earned every bit of its name of Mörktdal—the dark valley."

"High time I got well!" commented Miss Fox, moving forward and surveying the cariole with



amused eyes. "Am I to ride in that thing? It's like sitting in the bowl of a great spoon turned upside down. I'm afraid I'll slide down the handle and land on the horse's back."

Pollie laughed over this comparison, and as the procession began to move she called, "Well, Aunt Nancy, if that's a spoon, it is serving up sugar for us to-day."

Miss Fox kissed her hand to her little admirer and asked the Englishman if he didn't think that rather a neatly turned compliment for such a little girl.

"Well, not for an American little girl," he answered. "They're ever so keen, you know, when they're little; and when they're big—they're wonderful!" He looked at Caroline, slender and erect in her faultlessly trim and severe shirt-waist and skirt. "By Jove, Miss Morton, it makes a fellow feel like carrying off a whole chain of mountains on his shoulder to look at you—you look so fit and strong."

Caroline made no answer to this broadside assault, but the Englishman went on undaunted, turning to Miss Fox, "That's one thing I like about

American girls—they know just the right kind of clothes to wear for all occasions. Now here for instance Miss Morton doesn't hesitate to go out with just her shirt on. Englishwomen have such a foolish notion that they're not properly dressed with just their shirts."

Miss Fox swallowed a spasm of laughter over the face of amazed bewilderment which Caroline turned upon the unconscious Englishman, and explained hastily, "Mr. Campbell means, Caroline, that Englishwomen think they should always wear a jacket over their shirt-waists when they go out on the street."

"Yes, isn't it tiresome of them to be bound by a foolish fancy!" commented their countryman, while Caroline burst out with, "And they say they speak the same language we do!"

"What's that? What's that?" queried Campbell, vaguely apprehensive.

"Nothing," said Miss Fox conclusively.

Gunhild now came up beside the others, laughing and calling their attention to Pollie. The little girl

was surrounded by a throng of yellow-haired children, and a clatter of tongues rose shrilly from the group. Miss Fox was alarmed, "Oh, Gunhild, what are you thinking of? They'll frighten the child to death."

"Frighten her? Not they! They're friends of hers. She knows the name and family history of every one and they simply worship her. Rivedal has to shoo them out of the hotel when they get too thick. They go there to play with her, and she's learned more Norwegian that way! They must get the queerest ideas of America from what she tells them, for she never stops because she doesn't know a word. She just snatches up some other and sails right on——" She paused, and noting that the old lady still looked uneasy she said, indulgently, "Oh, if you'd rather, I'll send them away."

With the free grace and vigour of a wild creature she ran back to the group of children, said something and laughingly scattered them as she swung Pollie to her shoulder, and came bounding along the road, her strong white arms up-curved about the

little elf, who was shrieking with delight. Already they were at the foot of the hill whose summit was crowned with the old church. Gunhild ran past the party beside the cariole, and began springing up the steep ascent, singing again the first stirring measures of the *saeter*-song. The ecstatic spirit of the enchanting day seemed embodied in her tuneful flight.

When they came up beside her, she had set the child down and the two were deep in their usual folklore. "Yes, surely, we're on haunted ground. All over this hill are old Norse warriors buried, and on dark, windy nights in winter they get out of their unmarked graves and climb up to the top to worship Thor and Odin. But there stands the church and then—oh, my stars!—but they are mad! You can hear them rushing about, clashing their shields and swords and raving for hours at a time. I have heard them, myself. But it's no use—the old gods are dead and gone—and so they must go back to their graves again." She spoke in the serious tone she always used in telling stories to Pollie, which the child found irresistibly fascinating. She glowed

with a happy passion of vitality, and to meet her eyes was like a shock of electricity. "You must get well every day, Miss Fox," she called impulsively. "I don't know when I've been so just half-crazy with pleasure. It's the first time since I've been in Norway that I feel as I used to in America, like shouting for joy like a Valkyr." She turned again to the child and went on, "And once or twice it has happened that somebody was coming up the hill on a night when the warrior ghosts were out of their graves, and they rushed——"

"Oh, I say!" interrupted Mr. Campbell protestingly. "Don't tell the child such stories! You'll give her a nightmare. You fairly scare me when your eyes shine like that."

"I love nightmares. I *love* them!" cried Pollie fervently. "Go on, go on, Gunhild!"

But the girl was abashed by the reproof and shook her head silently. A moment later she dropped behind the party and began gathering a bouquet of the innumerable wild-flowers which grew beside the road.

For some time they climbed up the winding way without speech. Caroline walked steadily forward in one of her enigmatic silences, proof against the appealing looks which the Englishman threw at her. Harry led the gentle little horse, making of this an excuse to keep in front of the others. Miss Fox sat high in the cariole, her aquiline old face shining with delight at her release from prison. She drew in great breaths of the sweet, sun-warmed air and sat still straighter, her eyes sparkling. A glimpse of Harry's moody face, with drawn brows and one end of his moustache caught between his teeth, increased her satisfied content. All was going well.

She had not spoken to him on any but trivial topics since the day of Campbell's arrival, assuring herself that she was far too wise a woman to spoil a good effect by adding superfluous touches. From her storehouse of self-made aphorisms she drew one suitable to the occasion and rejoiced that she had enough self-restraint to follow it. "Break a man's heart if you please, but don't nag him," she had said

whenever she had been tempted to speak. She had not made the slightest objection to the continuance of his Norwegian lessons, which still went perfunctorily and half-heartedly on, nor to his seeing as much of Gunhild as conditions naturally provided. Indeed she dreaded nothing so much as a romantic or picturesque breaking off of the episode, with its consequent reaction. Her beneficent poison was working in his mind, but it must have constant confirmation from actuality. The new and chilling light she had cast on his foolish rose-coloured dream could only have the proper effect if the fatal facts were steadily there to be revealed. The only danger was now that they might go away before the process of disillusionment was complete.

She looked about her in great satisfaction with herself and all the world, down the jewel-green valley which they had traversed and up at the jagged peaks of the mountains. "Ah, I'm so glad to see that they think it safe to unpack those mountain-tops once in a while. They've kept them wrapped in cotton batting so constantly since we've been here

that I thought perhaps there was danger of their breaking off."

Pollie laughed, and Caroline smiled at this speech, but Campbell bent his serious eyes inquiringly on the old lady. "Ah, what is cotton batting, if I may ask?"

"Soft stuff, loose cotton—you know, what they wrap jewelry in so it won't break," explained Pollie.

"Oh," said the Englishman disjunctively, and then quite soberly, "But, Miss Fox, of course you couldn't really have enough of that to show on a big mountain top."

The Americans stared, and Pollie cried, "Why, of course not! That's just the joke, don't you see?"

"No," he returned bluntly, "I can't honestly say that I do see anything funny in saying that there has been taken off from a mountain peak what could never possibly have been there." The Americans forbore to look at each other. He went on with a slightly aggrieved accent, "That's always the way with your Yankee jokes. What was it—there was something else I've been meaning to ask you about



—oh, I remember! The first day I came when Miss Fox said Pollie had the wrong animal, and you all laughed. To save me I've not been able to see any joke!"

Miss Fox looked blank. "I don't remember saying anything like that," she said. "It certainly doesn't sound in the least humorous."

"Oh, yes, yes, yes!" cried Pollie. "I ran into Mr. Campbell in the hall and thought it was Harry, and you said I had the wrong animal. It was just a joke about your both having animal's names, don't you see?"

The Englishman pulled at his long moustache thoughtfully. "Blessed if I do!" he confessed honestly.

Miss Fox buried her face in her handkerchief and her shoulders shook. Harry bit his lip to suppress a smile. Pollie was all surprise and eager pity. She hurried on in an inextinguishably comic attempt at explanation, her face glowing with missionary ardour. "Oh, why, how can you *help* seeing the point? Two animals, you know! Your name is

Campbell—the humpy thing with a long neck, don't you remember?—and Harry's is *Fox*—and I thought a camel was a fox, don't you see? When they are the most different animals there are! Why, that's the point—*can't* you see it?"

Caroline glanced angrily at Harry and Miss Fox, who were struggling helplessly with an excess of hysterical mirth. They were far beyond speech. In an obscure way she felt that she was responsible for the man at whom they were laughing, although she would not own to such a feeling by openly championing his cause. She felt that they were all hovering over a powder mine of extreme rudeness which needed but a spark to set it off, but she seemed hopelessly ineffectual to avert the catastrophe. Her exasperation extended itself savagely to Campbell, meditating in an innocent unconsciousness. Suddenly his face cleared and his eyes brightened. "Oh, yes, I see what you mean. Our names sound like animals, but, don't you see, you've made a mistake." He spoke triumphantly, with the air of one who brings to light an overlooked but vital factor

in a situation. "You're quite wrong, for I spell mine with a *p*, don't you know!"

There was a moment's strained silence, in which Caroline set her teeth to endure the worst. Miss Fox was swaying speechlessly to and fro in the cariole, her face covered with her handkerchief, and Harry walked rapidly ahead, evidently on the verge of a break-down. Pollie faced the centre of the disturbance, her face set in that instant's blankness which precedes a screaming shriek of laughter. Her sister wished passionately that good breeding would allow her to cover the child's mouth with her hand and give her the shaking of which she felt herself at that moment so forcibly capable. There seemed no other escape.

At that instant Gunhild stepped forward with a cat-like quickness, and brought her hand down on Pollie's shoulder with so sharp and unexpected a blow that the child was startled into a momentary silence. "Pollie dear," she said in a sudden commanding burst, "run right along as fast as you can to that next house and ask the old woman for the

key to the church. Hurry now, and have it ready for us when we come past."

She gave her a push as she finished, and sent her scampering up the road. Then she turned to the Englishman and said heartily, "Sure Mike, Mr. Campbell, there is a *p* in your name. I just bet they forgot about that."

Campbell was all eager interest: "Yes, you see in England we don't pronounce it like the animal. *What* was that first thing you said? 'Sure Mike'? What does that mean?"

"That," said Gunhild proudly, "is the American for what you mean when you say, 'yes, indeed.'"

"Ah, really? Really!" exclaimed the other. "How very picturesque, isn't it, don't you know? But why '*Mike*'?"

"Give it up," said Gunhild, after a moment's thought. "It just is. I guess Miss Fox will have to get out and walk from here to the church. The rain has washed the road something awful."

It was all done in the twinkling of an eye and Caroline was still gasping with relief. She felt as

though a sure and steady hand had pulled them all safely over a thin bit of conversational ice when they had been about to break through into the chilling waters of a most disagreeable little incident.

They were safely on solid ground now, however. With a serious face Harry came back to help his aunt descend from the cariole and Campbell loaded himself with wraps according to Gunhild's suggestion, "It may be very damp in there, after the wet weather we've been having." There was indeed an almost portentous air of solemnity about the little group, and the two bearers of the name of Fox avoided Caroline's indignantly reproachful eyes with a somewhat shamefaced constraint.

They welcomed the beginning of the inspection of the church with ardour, and exhausted themselves in exclamations of surprise and admiration, until Gunhild was quite flushed with a happy pride.

She welcomed them in as to her own home, with the smiling, pleased importance of a loyally enthusiastic cicerone. They were allowed to overlook no detail, and their progress through the tiny edifice

took on the serious atmosphere of a pilgrimage to a holy spot. At the door she called their attention to the first of the strange decorations which filled the church. The handle of the great key, a foot long, was the head of a grinning demon, so she showed them; the great lock was set in the breast of another, and the very nail-heads which studded the low, worm-eaten door were all roughly shaped into malicious, horned faces. Inside the dark little entry-way she pointed out the holy-water bowl, supported by a grotesque figure of horror, and the old almsbox suspended from the claws of a stone spectre who issued from the very substance of the church wall.

As they entered, Miss Fox exclaimed over the effective lighting. From the outside she had looked at the tiny windows deep sunken in the massive walls, and had prophesied that the interior would be like a cellar for darkness. But a singularly clear though subdued light filled the cool old nave, showing every curve of the carved benches along the walls and of the heavy rafters which supported the roof. These were again made part of the grotesque

idea which reigned throughout the primitive attempts at decoration. Each one terminated in a 'demoniac carved and painted head, fiendish and menacing. This double row of staring, satanic visages burst on Pollie with a terrifying effect. She threw herself trembling into Gunhild's arms.

"What horrid, horrid things to have in a church!" she cried indignantly.

"Yes, it seems to me that it is a disagreeable, unsuitable way to ornament a church," said Caroline.

"Hideous idea! It's enough to give anybody a fit!" ejaculated Campbell in energetic agreement.

Gunhild flushed hotly and rushed to the defence of her treasure. "You don't get the idea at all," she said, her words coming in an impassioned burst unusual with her. "It's a beautiful, beautiful idea if you only see what's meant. It reminds you, the best way there is, of the only thing that makes it worth while living, and yet you forget it all the time. And that is that things are somehow fixed all right so that the worst things serve the good, that no matter how ugly or dreadful an experience may be, it is

really holding out something blessed to you—like the devil with the holy-water bowl. Look; they hold up the roof of the church, and they keep the money for the poor people safe, they open the door so people can come in——” She stopped short, tongue-tied embarrassment descending on her, though she still faced the critics defiantly.

For a moment Miss Fox slipped off her usual mask of passive and even-tempered attention to all events, and gave the girl a sudden surprised and melting glance of sympathy which brought the grateful tears to her eyes. She did not speak, but the child responded, with a sensitive eagerness. “I see! I see!” she breathed, looking about her with wide eyes. “Why, yes, I should love to come to church here.”

Gunhild answered with a return to her customary slow, trailing speech. “We don’t have services here but once a year when the bishop comes. It’s too cold and damp. The real services are down in the new wooden church in the village. But I come in here Sundays and sit awhile and think of Architect



Pettersen. He never could do enough for this church, and he spent nearly all his time fixing it over. He is buried there where the cross on the floor is."

She went back to her duties as guide and asked, turning to the women of the party, "Perhaps you'd like to have me open the big box and show you the linen for the altar?" She threw open a window to let in the air, and unlocked a vast carven chest against the wall. In a moment Caroline and Miss Fox were exclaiming in amazed admiration. "Yes, ain't it beautifully done!" assented Gunhild, stroking the folds; "and you must know that all that open work was done a hundred years before they had any scissors here in the Mörktdal. Those fine, fine threads were all cut with a knife."

"It's not possible! Do let us take it to the light."

Between them they carried the long altar cloth to the door and stood looking at it, when they heard a scream of alarm from Pollie. She came running to where they stood in the sunlight, looking fearfully back over her shoulder into the darkness of the church. "Oh, Gunhild!" she gasped, "Oh, quick!

Ingolf has just slipped in through the window. He looked so dreadful—like one of the devils——”

The Norwegian gave a start of apprehension and, dropping the cloth, rushed into the church.

“That’s an infernal little toad—that Ingolf!” exclaimed the Englishman.

Caroline clasped Pollie tightly and spoke with an alarmed severity. “It’s horrible to think of his being loose. In any civilised country they’d shut up such a malicious, dangerous little monster. *I* don’t see any use in keeping such creatures alive!”

Harry moved towards the church. “I think I’ll go and see if she can manage him alone,” he said. “He’ll do her a serious hurt some day.”

“She managed him alone a number of years before you came on the scene. I think it’s probable she can do so now,” remarked his aunt drily, but with the others she followed him through the entry-way. For a moment they stood on the threshold of the church, blinded by the sudden change from sunshine to semi-twilight.

There was a curious sound of shuffling and

stamping, and when their eyes grew accustomed to the dusk they saw Ingolf struggling in Gunhild's arms as she knelt beside him, and stamping both his feet savagely. He was emitting a low, barking sort of chant, which stirred his sister to an agony of distress.

"Oh, don't, Ingolf! *Don't!*" she commanded, tightening her hold upon his misshapen body.

At the sight of the Americans the dwarf stopped his frantic writhing and uncanny snarls and stared at them impudently, his thoughts evidently turned into a new channel by their appearance.

Gunhild explained over her shoulder, without rising from her knees, the meaning of the ugly little scene. Her voice was infinitely sad. "It's Architect Pettersen," she said. "Ingolf hates him so always! He is buried under where we are now, and Ingolf always tries to slip in when the church is open and stamp on his grave and say such dreadful, awful things. I don't know where he learned them."

She turned to him with a low murmur of imploring command.

Caroline had laid the altar cloth away in the chest and now stood near the two on the grave, looking at Ingolf with a shrinking expression of loathing. From where the others stood by the door, the three figures were framed in a square of light from the open window. Campbell exclaimed to Miss Fox, "By Jove, how splendidly straight Miss Morton always is, isn't she—like a lovely, slender young tree. See her now—how beautifully the light falls on her hair, standing beside that crouching peasant girl bent over the dwarf. You just couldn't imagine *her* stooping so, could you?"

Miss Fox started and looked at him in a frowning silence of displeasure, and after a moment's pause Harry answered with an enigmatic accent, "No, you couldn't indeed." As he spoke he surveyed his aunt's discomposure with an odd little air of triumph.

At this confirmation of his judgment the Englishman developed his idea further, with a naïve pride in his own eloquence. "Isn't that a picture for you—such a contrast between Miss Morton's slender

erectness and—— By Jove, it's not too much to say that they don't look as though they were made of the same material; *do* they now?"

To which Harry, gazing broodingly at the two women, answered steadily, "No, they don't."

## XI

### A Point of Honour

**M**R. CAMPBELL stood at the centre of a confused assemblage of tiny huts and looked about him with a mild despair. "I am lost," he said aloud. "Absurd! But I am. Miss Fox told me her nephew said it was the second turning to the right after you leave the hotel. I see nothing but turns. If there is any street the cabins are all in the middle of it. I'll ask if any one has seen the child."

He stooped his broad shoulders to a low, narrow door, and was about to knock when Pollie launched herself at him out of the dark interior. "Well, how did you ever find the place!" she cried admiringly. "The first time Harry came for me he had to ask everybody in the village, and when he got here he had about forty people with him. I suppose Aunt Nancy sent you for me? Oh, I'm so sorry I have to go back just now. Old Tante Ingeborg—that

means Old Aunty Ingeborg—is telling us the most exciting story!”

“See here, little one,” remonstrated the big Englishman seriously, “I don’t think it good for you to hear so many hobgoblin tales. If you were my kiddie, I’d throttle any old woman that filled you up on dead warriors strangling travellers, and trolls in the waterfalls.”

“Oh, but she’s not telling us any fairy stories to-day—though it sounds like one. It’s all about the party of fine people from Christiania that have come with the minister’s son and his rich wife to visit the minister—and the best part of it is that it’s not done yet. It’s a fairy story that’s happening before our eyes, something new every day. You see, there’s the most beautiful lieutenant come—oh, he looks just like a fairy prince—*just lovely!* He’s taller than you or Harry and a thousand times prettier, with yellow, yellow hair and moustache and such ‘fierce, bright blue eyes they just flash in the sun like a bare sword.’ I never saw them flash that way, though I’ve hung around the minister’s house an

awful lot, and so have all the other children, but Aunty Ingeborg says they do every time he sees Gunhild."

Campbell laughed out loud suddenly, and swinging the child to his shoulder, "Good Heavens, Pollie! What a flow of language, and what wind you have. I've been waiting for a period to tell you that Miss Fox and I have finished our game of chess and Mr. Fox says he's ready to start up the hill: but there is no use waiting for a pause. You have to plunge in head-first to stop your eloquence."

Pollie drummed her heels indignantly on his chest as he bore her along, and burst out, "You can't have heard a single word I said, or you'd be so *interested*! Why, Lieutenant Siegfried says he's going to marry Gunhild if she'll have him, and he's only been here ten days. He fell dead in love with her the minute he laid eyes on her—and he said—he dropped his cigarette he was so surprised—and he said——"

Campbell set the child down before the door of the hotel, and gave her a little shake to command her attention. "Now stop chattering, you little magpie,



and run up to your sister! Tell her Mr. Fox and I are waiting for you. You know what to say—Mr. Fox says he told you.”

“But—but,” gasped the little girl, “don’t you *care* about Gunhild and this lovely, rich, beautiful soldier that’s——”

“Who *is* Gunhild?” asked Campbell indifferently. “She’s the girl that’s been sort of nurse for you since you’ve been here, isn’t she—that solid-looking blonde peasant that took us through the church? I should say that Gunhild was very much in luck to get a lovely, rich, beautiful soldier, but I can’t say I take a burning interest in her love affairs. And in any case I think grown-up people’s love affairs are not things that little girls ought to know too much about.”

He lighted a cigar carelessly and looked at his watch, his mind so evidently and instantly on other topics that even Pollie’s eager enthusiasm was dashed.

By the time she had reached the head of the stairs this momentary defeat was forgotten in a sudden

fervour for the next event in the infinitely varied entertainment which everyday life was to her. With a shout of eagerness she burst into the room where her sister sat listlessly by the window. "Sister, hurry up and put on your hat. Aunt Nancy says she feels well enough to make the trip to the waterfall tomorrow, and Rivedal says he's sure the weather'll be fine. Harry and Mr. Campbell are waiting downstairs for us. We're all going up the hill to invite Gunhild."

Caroline did not stir. "Why do they ask Gunhild?"

"Oh! Why, Harry got the whole picnic up for her sake! She's afraid of the Fossegrim or something about the waterfall, and Harry's going to show her there's nothing to be scared of—why, of course *she* has to go. She's the one it's for, really."

Caroline rose and began putting on her hat in an ominous silence, which the little girl, capering destructively about the room, did not notice. She tore at the clothes in the closet to get at her own

wraps, pulled out and upset a drawer in an attempt to find her hat, and as she crammed the scattered contents back she flowed her steady stream of inconsequential exclamations, remarks, and questions, for whose answer she never drew breath.

She asked her sister in rapid succession if she didn't think Rivedal was awfully mean to the chambermaid, if she didn't just love Mr. Campbell, when she—Pollie—could begin to do up her hair on her head and wear long skirts, why Aunt Nancy was so queer and still these days, if she didn't think Gunhild was terribly sweet to that dreadful Ingolf, why she—Caroline—didn't do up her hair the way Gunhild does and Harry thinks is so pretty, and *oh*—she was stricken a moment speechless with a sudden thought. Springing to her feet she ran across the room to Caroline, crying excitedly, "Oh, sister, what *do* you think! It's like a fairy story. Gunhild has the most beautiful——"

She tripped on the rug, and fell headlong, dragging the cover from the dressing table with all its array of bottles.

Caroline's tense nerves snapped. She stamped her foot in an alarming gust of anger. "Mary Morton!" she exclaimed furiously, "will you never learn to keep still one minute? Now sit *down* and don't move till I'm ready to go! And don't talk either. Don't say another word—especially about Gunhild. I'm sick of her! I never want to hear of her again!"

She was a little ashamed of her violence as Pollie, awe-struck and contrite, crept up on the bed and sat like a statue of repentance until she moved towards the door. But she told herself that there was simply no other way to make the slightest impression on the heedless child, and moreover that impressions were as fleeting with Pollie as they were vivid, and that by the time they returned from their walk the incident would have been forgotten.

Her expectations were soon justified. On the way up the "haunted hill" Pollie began to relax her strained effort "to be good," and by the time they reached the tiny cabin she and Campbell were romping in the wildest merriment.

The sod-roofed log-house was empty, although the door stood open in the trustful fashion of the honest country-side. They stepped inside to make sure, but the two bare, clean little rooms were quite vacant,—only a big fly or two buzzing noisily against the shining panes of the incredibly small, low windows. Harry and Pollie, however, stated confidently that the owner could not be far away. The big loom stood gauntly stretching out its arms, a piece of cloth still taut on the rollers. Harry explained that, when Gunhild left the loom for long, she loosened a catch and let the cloth hang free. He seemed very familiar with all the household processes, as did Pollie. Of late they had taken their Norwegian lessons here instead of at the hotel. Pollie went back into the narrow entry-way where the high-raised hearth stood, and investigated a pot which hung from a crane over the glowing coals. "Oatmeal porridge," she announced. "That means they're going to have their supper here before very long. She must be somewhere quite near."

"I have it!" said Campbell. "I'll be Uncas and you be Natty Bumpo, and we'll go off scouting for her."

Pollie was beside herself with delight at this idea, and the two men and the child dispersed with low, mysterious pseudo-Indian calls and whistles.

Caroline stood in the middle of the whitely scoured floor and looked about her with a singular, unhappy curiosity. She was trying to imagine the scene when Harry took his Norwegian lessons and she drove home to her heart her shame at the misery brought to her by the mental picture. He sat here, probably in the only large chair, and Gunhild sat there with her ever-present knitting—there, where the sun came in through the window. It would fall first upon the shining glass, then on the bright flowers of the window plants, and then with a refulgent glory upon Gunhild's brighter head. Now, in the vacancy of the house it flashed a silver beam like a living thing from the old polished medal on the wall—the one ornament of the place. The tiny

room hummed and whispered almost audibly to the girl's straining ears. There came almost the sound of vibrant voices with a note of intimacy in their murmuring talk that turned her sick with misery. She could almost see them—Harry flushed and eager, irradiating the Norwegian with his rare, smiling regard—the look Caroline had had bent on herself last on the trip to the *saeter*, and which she imagined was constantly in his eyes as he looked at Gunhild.

The walls seemed to close in about her—the room was so tiny—they must perforce be so near each other! Memories nearly palpable of their hours together seemed to fill the air, rustling and whispering at her ears. Some day, surely, they must lay the book down and—

The girl, standing so tensely erect as though stretched on a rack of pain, suddenly put her hand to her throat and fled out of the house into the late sunshine. She felt stifled, suffocated—and ran blindly before her—anywhere, only escaping from that tiny, tiny room.

Her eyes burned hotly so that she longed for tears, and the sound of running water drew her half-consciously towards it.

A voice called to her in surprise and warning, "Oh, Miss Morton, is that you? Look out for the loose stones!"

Caroline stopped short. She was standing by the little river, whose cool, clear voice rose singing in the evening air. Gunhild was but a few steps from her, kneeling on the stones with the wooden paddle of Norwegian washerwomen lifted in the air. Back of her was a little fire under a big copper kettle propped on large stones. The fire burned clear and smokeless, but from the kettle there rose thin wreaths of steam, wavering up in the still air back of Gunhild's golden head like incense. Near the kneeling woman was a pile of white clothes, which she was rinsing in the transparent water as it slid past her over the stones.

She fell to her work again, glancing up at Caroline as she spoke but without her usual smile. "You scared me—coming so sudden. I was afraid you'd



turn your ankle on these big loose stones. But I guess you're pretty sure-footed, ain't you?"

Caroline felt anything but sure-footed at the moment and sat down heavily on a boulder, her hand still holding open the loosened collar of her dress. Her breath came in short gasps. She looked steadily at Gunhild with a strange expression, but she did not speak.

After a pause filled with the pleasant, murmuring talk of the little river, the washerwoman went on, "I suppose I can congratulate you, Miss Morton, can't I——" She stopped in embarrassment as though not knowing how to proceed in face of the American's daunting silence. "It probably seems funny to you to be congratulated now when you're so used to it—but, you see, I've just heard of it. Tante Ingeborg told me this morning that Pollie says you and Mr. Fox are to be married in London when you go back there. You see, I hadn't heard—though I suppose I might have——" She made the statement in a voice which tried to be quite steady and with the definite falling inflection of affirmation, but she fixed

her eyes on Caroline as she spoke, and stopped her work in an expectant silence.

Again the rippling water raised its cheerful, indifferent voice against a long silence. Caroline's face did not alter a line of its curious, enigmatic expression, but she was half choked by the sudden furious throbbing of her heart. It seemed to her that pulses beat at her every pore—that the very stones beneath her rocked and swayed in the exultant whirl which turned her dizzy. She tried to think, but her brain failed her.

Gunhild looked down at the water gliding past her knees like molten glass. With an absent, automatic motion she drew a long white sheet, like a shroud, from the pile of clothes and dipped it carefully in the water. When she looked up there was no longer any question in her eyes. "Perhaps I shouldn't have spoken about it?" she said, as if putting a tentative interpretation to Caroline's silence. "Perhaps it's not manners to say anything."

The other made no answer. Through her delirious excitement there beat steadily an excusing, con-

doning thought. "I have not said a word. It just happened. It's not my fault. I've not said a single word."

But this reed of comfort snapped in her hands at Gunhild's next speech. "Here come the others. Perhaps I shouldn't mention it to Mr. Fox——"

Although Caroline's answer burst out in a breathless haste, it seemed an hour of vibrating silence before her own ears took in the significance of the words. Then as from a great distance she heard herself say, hurriedly, "No—no! Don't speak of it to him. We—I—we don't—in America; we don't like to speak of such things." And she looked abroad upon the world amazed to find its aspect unchanged.

Harry and Campbell came racing down the hill carrying Pollie between them. Her shrill cries of delight and their gasping laughter as, quite out of breath, they reached the two women by the river, seemed the last touch of intolerable confusion to Caroline, now turned to a deathlike pallor. If she could only think, she cried to herself, if she could

only be quiet for a moment and think, she would know what she had done and how to alter it, but the chatter and restless, broken exclamations of the newcomers seemed to make her physically dizzy. She seemed forced to listen to their light and trivial talk as though something fateful depended on their words. She strained her ears to hear Campbell explaining gaily to Gunhild how they had found her by the steam rising from the kettle; and she hung breathless on Harry's exclamations of admiration over the picturesque scene.

"Why, it's poetry—to wash out of doors like this, with a shining copper kettle behind you! I wouldn't mind being a washerwoman myself; only I wouldn't look so like a priestess of some old Norse cult, stirring up the sacred stew, or whatever they had."

Gunhild's usual ready smile did not answer this. She stood up seriously, fastening together her under-bodice over her broad white bosom, and smoothing her loosened hair. A momentary constraint came upon the group. Then Harry went on, "Is this still your everlasting ministerial washing?"

"No," said Gunhild, beginning to pack the clothes away in an osier basket. "No, this is Ingolf's wash and mine. The minster's work is done. The minister's son and his wife and his friends have arrived and we can all draw a free breath at last and begin to do our own work." She spoke soberly as though of an important event, but Harry answered with an inattentive lightness of tone, "Just the thing then—we're come exactly in time."

The three between them explained the purpose of their visit. At Gunhild's hesitating, they urged her eagerly, all talking at once in a gay turmoil for which Caroline felt a sick resentment. Finally, Gunhild interrupted them, "You'll laugh at me, I'm afraid, but honestly, I'm half scared to go. Yet I want to see the waterfall close to, and have it over with. I expect it's like hearing something is true that you've dreaded to know, and yet you find it's a real relief to be sure ever of the worst. It's not so bad as you think." She looked at Caroline as she said this and smiled for the first time, a bravely steady smile before which Caroline turned away in

a sort of anguish. Then she looked at the others and laughed a little, her throaty bubble of amusement. "I tell you," she said, quaintly, "I bet it'll be like having a milk tooth out that's been loose and bothering you for a long time. You just hate to touch it, and yet when it's gone you're so glad it's over with, because you've got a grown-up tooth coming in its place."

It ended by her agreeing to be at the hotel early the next morning. "It'll probably be our last excursion here," Pollie told her. "We'll be going on in a very few days. Aunt Nancy is well again."

"All right, sir!" said Gunhild. "We'll celebrate. I'll take a whole day off—my last vacation for *one* while! I've been so lazy since you've been here."

She swung the basket of clothes to her shoulder, refusing with a dignified firmness the assistance of the two men, and strode off up the hill, her bared, white arms raised high in an enchanting curve. Under the weight of the heavy burden, her fine upright carriage lost none of its elastic strength. Her

golden head was as proudly erect as ever was Caroline's brown one.

On the way home Pollie fell to wondering what was the matter with her teacher. "She seemed so queer, didn't she? Never kissed me once."

"Perhaps she was tired," suggested Campbell.

"Tired? Gunhild tired!" cried Harry. "It's unthinkable." Caroline made no comment, walking on in silence with drooping head. She was unusually quiet during the evening and disappeared for the night when she took Pollie up to bed. She undressed the little girl with absent kindness, and brushed the flying elf-locks gently. As if feeling blindly some obscure sympathy with the other's mood, sensitive Pollie was quite still and crept into bed without a word.

Caroline also undressed and went to bed, although she lay with wide-open eyes staring at the ceiling. For a long time the sisters lay thus, each in her own narrow bed. Caroline's face was set and her breath came and went rapidly. One hand, tightly clinched, was thrown over her head. From time to time she

caught her lip between her teeth to stop its trembling. Pollie looked over at her with an awe-struck wonder, the clear twilight of the room showing her that her sister's bed was shaking steadily.

Suddenly she sat up with a howl of dismay. "Oh, sister! What's the matter with everything! It makes me feel so queer inside. I feel so miserable—my throat's all tight. Let me get into bed with you, please, *please*."

Caroline did not turn her head. She spoke in a tense, strained voice with no inflection, "Sister can't help you now, Pollie. She's not very well. Lie still and go to sleep, dear."

This rebuff was the climax to Pollie's woe. The tears began to roll down her cheeks. "Oh, please let me get into bed with you! I'm so homesick. Aunt Nancy's so queer, and Harry's so queer, and now even Gunhild is—oh, I *didn't* mean to speak of her, honest I didn't! I do want to be good and do what you say. I won't speak of her *ever* again. Oh, I wish I was home! I want to see my papa!"

The little white figure slipped down from its bed



and ran across the room to Caroline. "Take me in, sister—oh, please, *please* take me in!"

Caroline's rigid body lay still for a moment. She closed her eyes with an expression of death-like fatigue, and a long shudder shook the bed again.

Then she raised her arm and the bed-coverings. Pollie crept in and nestled close. Her sister's arm fell about her in a protecting embrace. "Come in, Pollie dear. So, put your head on sister's shoulder. Now forget all about it and go to sleep." The steady, strained monotony of her voice broke into a child-like quaver, "Oh, sister wishes she could sleep too!"

The little girl clung passionately for a few moments to her comforter, and then she suddenly relaxed and dropped off in the swoon-like sleep of childhood. The dark little head pressed heavily on Caroline's arm, but she did not move it. She lay quite still with hot, dry eyes fixed widely on the ceiling.

## XII

### **The Fossegrim**

**P**OLLIE had been unusually quiet, apparently absorbed in watching the regular swing of the long, slim oars and their rhythmical, splashing descent into the water. The others had talked idly on indifferent topics, but finally noticing the child's dreamy silence they had fallen to watching her with amused smiles, asking each other in whispers what was going on inside her fantastic little head.

There was no sound at all but the lapping of water against the high-curved prow of the boat and the creak and splash of the oars. The water was mirror-like, a curious pale milky green, though where the overhanging verdure-clad mountains were reflected it took on a deeper note, almost black. In the wake of the boat the ripples, catching momentary reflections from the sky as they lay at an angle to the surface, gleamed a sparkling blue. Not a breath of

air was abroad. The movement of the boat was an anomaly in all that still landscape, which in its enchanted tranquillity seemed cast under a spell.

Under the gaze of her elders, Pollie came to herself with a start and threw back her hanging elflocks. "Well, Pollie, did you get it settled?" asked Campbell.

"How ever did you know I was trying to settle something? Yes, I did. I was trying to think what it was Gunhild reminded me of, sitting up there in front by herself, and I just kept at it till I remembered. It's one of the figure-heads we saw in the old shipyard you took us to, in England—the one they kept in the little shed by itself. Don't you remember? It was the only one that was still brightly painted and carved. Gunhild always looks sort of carved and painted; doesn't she?"

Campbell laughed and called to the silent, erect figure in the bow of the boat, "Ha! Ha! Did you hear that? You didn't know you always looked painted, now, *did* you?" He smiled around him

after this sally, with an innocent pride in his own wit.

Gunhild turned her head for a moment and smiled absently, but she returned at once to her position of strained attention. Her eyes were fixed on the spectral white of the waterfall, as yet so far away as still to be quite inaudible.

Campbell began to entertain the company with whimsical similes for the odd colour of the water, which he explained was due to the stream of "glacier milk" flowing from the mass of ice above them. "It's frightfully deep here," he told them informally. "Enough to scare you to think of—as deep as the ocean itself, you know. They say it's just as far down to the bottom as it is up to the mountains—we're suspended half-way, as it were." He paused to allow them time to gaze painfully up at the sky-touching peaks and down shudderingly at the water. "That's why it looks so thick—like half-melted glass. What a curious colour it is, to be sure. What does it look like to you, Miss Morton?"

The others joined chatteringly in this conversa-

tional game, grateful for the presence of the cheerful, obtuse Englishman, and following with relief every lead of his trivial, impersonal talk. The usual clear olive of Caroline's face was a creamy pallor, but her eyes shone gallantly and she outdid herself in poetical similes. Harry did his duty by the topic in his most graceful, absent manner.

Miss Fox, wrapped in rugs and surrounded by pillows, suddenly laughed aloud. She had been looking in a grim silence out over the fjord, and this burst from her made them turn their heads expectantly towards her. "You young people can be as poetical and high-flown as you please, but I have the only really adequate simile. It looks like pale green lemon jelly that has a little too much gelatine in it."

Pollie interrupted the laugh which followed this, to say, "So it does—as though you could cut it with a knife and eat it with a spoon."

Caroline caught the ball lightly and tossed it on. "It would need to be the spoon Aunt Nancy rode in

the day we went to the church," she cried with a gay laugh, which won an approving look from the old Spartan among the pillows. "Caroline is game—she is her father's daughter," she noted.

Apparently Gunhild heard none of the talk. One hand resting on the high prow, she half knelt, half stood with her back to the boat's occupants. Suddenly she put her hand to her heart, and whirling about sank on a seat. Her face was very pale. They all cried out in alarmed question. She held up one hand for silence. The rowers stopped a moment, and in the intense hush they caught the first booming roar from the cataract. For an instant some of Gunhild's agitation spread to them. They sat with strained, uplifted faces, listening uncomprehendingly to the menacing sound. Harry half rose from his seat, but before he could take a step, Pollie made one of her wild plunges the length of the boat and threw herself into Gunhild's arms. "Don't you be afraid, you dear!" she cried, clasping her arms about the other's neck. "We're all here and we shan't let the old Fossegrim hurt you."

The tension was broken, they stirred and laughed, even Gunhild.

The colour came back to her face, the wonderful cool rosy glow. She took Pollie on her lap and held her close, burying her face in the child's dark hair. After a time she began telling her a story. She spoke in so low a tone that the others could hear nothing but the little girl's occasional delighted bursts of laughter.

All at once one of the rowers gave a deep-voiced cry of amazement and drew back his foot from a pile of tarpaulins in the bottom of the boat. The black mass was violently agitated, twisting and turning as though a nest of serpents had suddenly wakened to life in it. The Norwegians stared at the unchancy sight, their eyes starting from their heads. "Good God, what can that be!" exclaimed Campbell, springing to the spot. With his usual bold decision he seized the fabric and lifted it high in his arms. From its folds dropped lightly the twisted body of Ingolf, falling on his feet with a quiet, cat-like ease. Pollie screamed in dismay and

clung trembling to Gunhild, hiding her face in the girl's bosom. Gunhild put her down gently.

"Go back to your sister, Pollie," she said, "I must look after Ingolf." And to the others she apologised with a dignified distress. "I'm so *sorry* this has happened! I'd no idea he knew where I was going. I hope you won't let it spoil the excursion. Ingolf—come here."

For the rest of the trip she scarcely took her eyes from the dwarf, although he sat quite still, only his evil eyes wandering about. Once he caught Harry's eye, and gave him so horrible a grimace of malevolence that the young man started as though he had been physically threatened. At this the dwarf chuckled noiselessly, casting a wary, sidelong look at Gunhild.

The roar of the waterfall grew louder and louder, and they could plainly see the incredible violence of its descent. The river threw itself from the top of the mountain to the fjord in a sort of dreadful fury, as though, condemned to immortality, it were forever making a despairing attempt to end its life.



Its long white reflection in the water seemed to prolong its descent to the terrifying depths of which Campbell had spoken. The raging tumult of its uproar hushed their light talk and they sat daunted, watching the spectre, silent so long but now angrily voicing its unintelligible message.

They all looked apprehensively at Gunhild, fearing some nervous shock from the proximity of the dreaded giant; but she was evidently entirely preoccupied with her anxiety about Ingolf. Miss Fox voiced the common feeling when she exclaimed emphatically, "Well, I never dreamed I should ever be glad to have that little reptile along. For once in his life he's of some use in the world—he's doing what the devils in the old church have to do."

They made a landing some distance from the fall, Miss Fox having shouted through the noise that she must be far enough away from the cataract to avoid the flying spray which spread in every direction, a white cloud shot through with innumerable rainbows. As they landed in a quiet spot sheltered by huge boulders from the sight of the fall as well as

from its damp breath she said, "I suppose you romantic young people would like to go and eat your lunches in the midst of the spray, and pretend you are nixies. But an old woman who's just recovering from sciatica prefers dry rocks and sunshine. Beside, you can't hear yourselves think if you are any nearer to that prodigious creature. Mercy! How he does bellow and yell!"

Gunhild was busy in a moment, giving directions to the rowers about pulling up the boat, getting out the lunch-baskets, and keeping a watchful eye on Ingolf. This last care was removed by the dwarf's snatching his two hands full of food, and disappearing over the rocks. As he passed Gunhild in his flight, he threw himself suddenly against her, pushing her to the ground. Her only exclamation as she rose and looked after him with sad, anxious eyes, was, "Oh, I hope he won't slip and hurt himself!" At this Harry turned to his aunt and gave her a long significant look, before which she turned away impatiently.

Gunhild refused all offers to help. "No, it's the

only thing I can do—to set the table. You must let me help what I can. Go and sit down. I'll call you when things are ready."

Pollie, however, hung near her with her usual inconvenient devotion, tripping her as she stepped quickly about, and getting in her way like a playful and bothersome kitten. Her antics brought an occasional smile to Gunhild's serious and absent face, and once, as the child started up with an unconsidered movement, lost her balance and fell, scattering about her a whirlwind of sugar cakes, the gush of laughter of the two reached the ears of the rest of the party above the continuous deep voice of the cataract.

Miss Fox, Caroline, and Campbell sat on rugs and shawls, making a pleasant picture of contented picnickers, each talking industriously of things as far away as might be from their thoughts. Harry lay in the sun, his cap pulled over his face,—only his dark moustache and cleft chin visible. For once he rejected absolutely his share of the responsibility for the appearance of things, withheld himself from the

duty of conversation, and made no pretence of listening to what was said. Caroline did not look at him at all. At the lunch table, as Pollie called the flat rock on which Gunhild had laid out the food, there was a continuance of the same programme. Gunhild and Pollie talked and laughed together in low tones, Campbell displayed an inexhaustible fund of obvious questions and good-humoured remarks, and Miss Fox kept the ball of talk in the air with an open effort, although Caroline was indomitable in her assistance. Harry scarcely opened his lips, and did not in the least conceal the fact that his thoughts were elsewhere.

At the close of the difficult meal Miss Fox disposed herself on her pillows with a sigh of relief. "You young folks go and clamber around that damp howling monster all you please. Your Aunt Nancy is beyond such foolishness."

The others set off in an irregular line, climbing over the huge rocks which frequent avalanches had hurled down along the shore. Caroline devoted herself to Campbell, whose open pleasure had in it a

note of pathos. Harry walked on one side of Gunhild and Pollie on the other. The child plucked constantly at the girl's dress to call her attention, and poured out a stream of chatter which kept Gunhild's bright head bent to that side, in the effort to hear above the noise, which now grew almost unbearable.

They reached the edge of the waterfall and stood looking with awe-struck eyes at the white, quivering mass, thundering down from the very heavens, it seemed to them. Gunhild pointed up, and they began to climb the face of the cliff beside the cataract. It was seamed and broken and full of ledges, so that although their way was not easy it was quite practicable. As they climbed up away from where the water crashed into the fjord, the noise grew less. At the height of three hundred feet they were surprised to find it almost still again, so that they could talk and be heard without effort. The water slid over a projecting slant of rock at this point with a sort of horrifying swift and silent violence.

After gazing at this glassy slope for some time

Harry noticed an optical illusion often seen on ship-board, when the eyes are suddenly transferred from the water swirling past to the planks of the deck and the latter seem to move for an instant in the opposite direction. Shifting his eyes quickly from the downward plunge of the water to the rocks on the side, they seemed to move upon him in a stealthy crawl. Apparently the other man made the discovery at the same instant, for he turned and said, "It's easy to see where the legends of wicked fairies in cataracts come from. It's enough to turn the steadiest head to look at that water long. The very rocks begin to creep and crawl."

"Why, how *can* they?" cried Pollie. "Show me how!" She sprang forward, stepped on a loose stone, and fell to the ground with a cry of pain. "Oh, I've turned my ankle," she said, with a frightened face. "I can't stand on it a minute."

There was a consultation as to how to meet this emergency, which ended in Harry's picking up the child to carry her back to his aunt. "She'll be better there in any case. She's in the way here," he

said **inflexibly**. As he began climbing carefully down the cliff he looked back and hesitated, facing the **little** group in a palpable indecision. Finally his face cleared and shone in an ardour of resolve. Unmindful of the other two he smiled at the Norwegian and called loudly, "Wait here for me, Gunhild. I have something to say to you."

Before he turned back he saw Caroline motion impatiently to Campbell to follow her higher up the cliff, and Gunhild seat herself obediently on a stone. His last look up showed him her brilliant bodice and golden hair radiant in the sunlight.

He carried the heavy child down the cliff, rapidly along the rocky beach, and set her down by his aunt, not stopping to answer her surprised questions but instantly turning back in a sharp run. He flamed in a fever of impatience, a rush of words burning his lips, as he sprang up the cliff with a reckless haste.

When he came again in sight of the narrow ledge on which he had left the others he saw Gunhild still sitting on the stone, gazing fixedly into the water

and leaning forward over it. Something of unnatural tension in her position struck cold upon his glowing mood. He redoubled his speed, and when he came within earshot he was pierced through with a sickening alarm to hear her voice raised in a steady call for help. She did not turn her head nor move a muscle of her ever more and more strained attitude, but she cried in a sort of anguish, "Oh, come quick! Come quick! I am losing my balance. *Help!* The Fossegrim——" A breath of wind carried her voice away for an instant, and before it began again the man had given a bound which sent him high up the cliff towards her, so that the rattle of flying stones and falling gravel drowned out other sounds. He was beside himself, and compassed the most insane distances with his leaps. It was not a moment before he was on the ledge below hers, from which he could again hear her call. It was sunk to a lower note now, but with so despairing a tone of agonising fear and helplessness in it that for a breath his heart seemed to stop beating. He caught a glimpse of her, standing now, rigid and



tense, close by the edge of that perfidious glassy slope. Her body seemed held in a vise and forced forward, but that she was struggling mightily against the obsession was shown by her steady and frantic appeals for help.

As Harry darted up to catch a projecting knob of rock to swing himself level with her, her figure was suddenly shut out from his eyes by a grinning mask of horror. Ingolf looked down upon him, balancing over his head a huge round stone. He cast it at the man below him, swiftly, violently. With a spring to one side Harry avoided it, but half falling he drove his heel into a pile of loose shale, which gave way beneath him, carrying him in a miniature avalanche down the cliff. He threw himself on his face, grasping desperately at the rock as he slid past, but it was not until the whole mass crashed into a solid projection of the cliff that his wild fall was stopped. He was half stunned by the shock, but he sprang to his feet staggering and dizzy, and flew at the wall of rock before him like a madman. He shouted and screamed to Gunhild wildly, but his

voice seemed lost in the noise of the water, and he realised that he had no breath to waste. He bent every energy of his strong young body to his task in a fury which seemed to burst his veins, climbing desperately upward and taking incredible chances as he leaped from rock to rock. In a moment Gunhild's voice reached him again, a long inarticulate wail of terror, but it sped him upward in a yet more frenzied flight. At least there was still hope.

As he reached the ledge where she stood he saw that he was too late. Her tense rigidity had broken and she was swaying forward in a dizzy fall.

Too late? Good God! He should *not* be too late!

With a supreme effort he bounded up over the intervening space and flung his arms about the falling figure. For an instant's eternity the two hung trembling on the edge of the abyss. Then the balance swung and the man threw the woman violently back upon the rocks, although the effort carried him past her, down over the ledge into empty air.

Sure of her safety, his last thought as he fell headlong down the cliff, was a wild, exultant prayer for life. "Oh, surely I cannot die now! *Now*, I must live—I must live."

## XIII

### Nephew and Aunt

**I**T was eminently characteristic of Miss Fox's courageous disregard of the surface aspect of things that she should decide to leave her nephew alone in Naesvangen when he was still too weak to be out of bed. Her resolve shocked the Englishman, and he endeavoured to reason with her.

“My dear lady, think how it will look! I speak only in your own interests, to protect you from what people will say. I don't believe you realise how it will seem to outsiders—like a desertion, you know—and after he was so devoted to you when you were ill.”

Miss Fox tossed her snowy head in disdain. “Do you suppose I've lived to be seventy-one years old and still am foolish enough to govern myself by what people will think! We've stayed here two

interminable weeks with him, and we now leave the doctor and nurse from Bergen in charge of his case. He's completely out of danger and doesn't need us at all—in fact, doesn't want us.”

As her companion still pulled dubiously at his moustache, she went on significantly, “Caroline has been mewed up in this dark hole quite long enough. I brought her abroad because her father wanted her to travel and enjoy life, not to spend her precious time in the most forsaken spot in all Europe, waiting for sick people to get well. I don't know what her father will be thinking of me, now!”

The reference to Caroline silenced Campbell's objections, though he still hesitated and stammered. “I have only one request,” he finally brought out imploringly, “and that is that I may be allowed to travel with you during the rest of your stay in Norway, and take the place of your nephew as much as I can. I know the country so well, I can really be of service to you. Please let me go!”

He stood before her, flushing with the eagerness of his appeal, serious, deeply moved and honestly

showing it. Miss Fox regarded him with a kindness that was for a moment almost affection.

"I don't know whether it's wise or not, my dear, or best for your own interests; but as far as I am concerned, I shall be very glad to have you in our party. I'm old-fashioned enough to like to have a man about when I travel, and," she added drily, laying her hand on his arm, "you are certainly a man, and I trust you."

Campbell drew a long breath of reprieve and took her hand in one of his cruelly hearty grasps. "Oh, thank you, dear lady, thank you!" he cried, and was off like a joyous schoolboy to his packing.

Miss Fox looked after his retreating figure and shook her head with a wry smile. "The way of the world," she said as she turned to enter her nephew's room.

She wasted no words in preparatory explanations. "Harry, I've come to say good-bye," she announced abruptly. "You'll be glad to hear that you are to be left alone to recover and—do anything else you wish."

The young man turned his head on the pillows, away from the window through which he had been gazing at the fjord, and at the far-away cataract again silently beckoning with a ghostly gesture over the still waters. He also spoke with a startling directness. "Yes, Aunt Nancy, I am glad you are going. You always know what is best to do and have the courage to do it." He smiled faintly and closed his eyes. He was very pale and his dark hair was hidden under a mass of bandages, but his face was singularly serene. It shone with a tranquil radiance almost physical. "In a few days I'll have these off," he pointed to the white bandages, "and then I'll be well enough to get up. I don't need you any more and you'll all be better off somewhere else. I shan't be lonely," he added, looking again out of the window. "I have always the Fossegrim."

"Good gracious!" ejaculated his aunt, "you talk like any other superstitious Norwegian! Will the country ever let you out of its unearthly grip, do you suppose? Really, when it comes to taking comfort

in the company of a waterfall—and that one nearly the death of you——!”

The man did not follow the lead of light commonplace thus held out to him. He answered very seriously, “I love that cataract! It was in its roar that my eyes were finally opened. Do you know, Aunt Nancy, what I was rushing to do when I began climbing the cliff? I was in a very fury of impatience to reach Gunhild, take her in my arms and ask her to be my wife: and—I may as well tell you now, that is what I mean to do as soon as I am strong enough to be about.” There was no defiance in his manner as he made this announcement. He spoke gently but with the unearthly directness of a man who has been at death’s door, and who has as yet come back to a realisation only of the large things of life.

His aunt came over to the bed and put her hand on his shoulder. Her eyes shone and her voice trembled. “My dear boy,” she said, “you may like to know that you have your poor old aunt back of you. Heart and soul I am with you.”



Harry glanced up at her startled, and for a moment there was silence in the room as the two comrades looked into each other's eyes in a long and understanding gaze. Then the man's lips moved and he spoke in a hushed whisper, "Dear aunt, dear mother of my soul! Now is the last doubt gone!"

Miss Fox broke the tension with one of her short laughs. She sat down on the edge of the bed and looked whimsically at her nephew. "Yes, Harry, I'm a victim to her as well as you. If I were a young man you'd have a rival to face. She is one of the rarest creatures in the world. Don't say I'm inconsistent, because I am. I glory in it. I have at least eyes that see after they are opened. That day we went to the church when she made us all show as **rude** barbarians and only saved poor Campbell by a **deftness** that any *grande dame* could have envied her; her attitude to Ingolf, her attitude to you—why, she has shown steadily a refinement of feeling which I blush to say would have been beyond me." She drew a long breath and went on in her generous self-abasement. "I think even while I was pouring

out on your poor head the vials of my unutterably foolish worldly wisdom—even then I think I must have known. I'm your father's sister after all and I must have some courage and wisdom under the crust of short-sighted, mean, conventional ideas which long life in a wicked world has formed about me. I'm really not so unspeakably sordid a narrow-minded, ignorant little bourgeoisie as that conversation would make you think." She laughed again, but her eyes were glisteningly bright. Harry carried her hand to his lips in silence.

"And yet," she continued, "the dispensations of Providence are fearfully and wonderfully arranged. I'm not sorry that the cowardly and suspicious old maid, experienced in the ways of the world, was the first to speak, before the real Nancy Fox came to the surface. It's just as well that you should be fully aware of all there is to be said on the other side."

Harry laughed aloud. "I think you stated it all, dear aunt, *all!* Even my mother could scarcely have found more objections or urged them more hotly."

At the mention of his mother a shadow fell upon them, and they sat for some moments without speaking. The sick man closed his eyes and turned his head wearily away.

So united did they feel that Miss Fox spoke as though in definite response to an articulate expression when she finally exclaimed, throwing her high nose up defiantly, "Harry, it's all right! You must live your own life, not your mother's! She has already had two lives—her own and your father's, and that is enough. I've seen her absorb and pervert my brother's life—I shall not stand by and see her do the same to his son, not as long as my name is Nancy Fox and he is man enough to marry a noble woman in spite of conventionalities. Harry, I'd be ashamed of you if you didn't do it." Her bright old eyes flashed valiantly and her voice rang like a trumpet call.

The other surveyed her in an unsmiling earnestness and again pressed her hand. She touched his cheek with a rare caress and went on more gently, "Besides, my dear, there is always a possibility—a

faint one I admit, but still possible—that it may not be so bad as we fear. I can scarcely conceive of a human being whom Gunhild in course of time could not win over. When I think of her as we've seen her here—I have always in my mind the picture of her as she came carrying you over the rocks to me—actually carrying you! It's like a woman of another age. And then her dignity and restraint all that frightful, interminable journey back to the village—leaving you entirely to Caroline and me and busying herself with Ingolf. Has any one told you that Ingolf too was hurt when you all slipped on the stones?"

"Was he indeed?" said Harry with a grim accent.

"And then since—the most perfect great lady of the world could not have surpassed the reserve and dignity she has shown. She has inquired after you every day, but we have scarcely seen her more than at the door; and that when all her woman's instinct must tell her that now is the time of all others when she would seem most dear to you. She has left

Caroline a clear field and has withdrawn herself until you can make some definite move——”

The sick man frowned suddenly at this, made an impatient exclamation, and released his aunt's hand. She went on inflexibly, “Oh, I know it doesn't sound pretty to you to put it in that bald way, but I can't stop to pamper your excessive modesty before the naked truth. You know as well as I do how things——”

“But, Aunt Nancy, there's Campbell! He's a fine fellow. I've thought that Caroline seemed to like him. It seemed—perhaps——” His voice died away before the affectionate scorn in the old lady's eyes.

“Don't juggle with facts to *me*, Harry!” she cried sharply. “Have the courage of your convictions, but look at conditions as they are.” She laughed abruptly. “You'll get no sympathy from Gunhild for your moral hair-splittings. She'll call it lying. She hasn't so much subtlety of grey matter as in the least to interfere with the most rigid uprightness.”

Harry cried out eagerly at this, all his pale face

lighting up in a fervent glow. "Yes, that's just it! Without being in the least aware of it she lives in an atmosphere of large, pure motives, as far as heaven is above earth from the little, complaining, paltering, hesitating world which I've always inhabited and which my mother calls civilised society." This time his mother's name brought with it no chill of apprehension. He went on in a mounting emotion which shook him visibly, "It is as I told you before. She'll make a man of me! One must be at his best even to breathe the air she moves in. Only to look at her is like an imperious summons to drop trivialities and concern oneself with real things. She makes a world where it's more than possible to live well—where one must live always at the highest——" He stopped, his voice breaking, and looked out of the window at the waterfall. His aunt gazed at him, an infinity of tender doubt in her eyes. When he spoke again it was with a return to his unearthly sick man's voice. "And I, blind fool I, hesitated before such nobility. It was her own dreaded troll in the cataract who finally gave me

wisdom. And yet, after all, such a poor and simple wisdom, which any child would have. The wisdom we despise the man with the muck-rake for not having—just to stop raking in the dirt and to set a golden crown upon his head. It seems curious I should have been so long in gaining it.”

There was another long silence. Miss Fox stirred restlessly once or twice and finally voiced her doubt. “You’re not shutting your eyes to some things you’ll have to face, are you, Harry? You may be surer than when we talked last and I may be converted, but your world, the scoffing, mocking world of sceptics and cowards, is just the same. You must know it won’t be easy. You must never expect Gunhild to hide for an instant anything of what her life has been. You must know that never by the faintest breath can you hint to her of a difference in station. You must be prepared for an eternity of petty——”

Harry broke in with an impatient gesture. “What do you suppose I’ve been thinking about, all these weeks when I’ve been like a moody wild ani-

mal! I went over and over that eternity of petty annoyances—I'm ashamed to think how carefully I counted the cost. Bitterly ashamed to know myself so reluctant to leave my muck-heap."

The woman of the world protested with an instinctive fear of unbalance. "But, my dear boy, it's not all muck. You're going too far. You really do make a sacrifice, you know. You *are* separating yourself from the world you've always lived in and you must try and imagine how it will seem when you are no longer in the exalted state of this crisis. There will be times when bad grammar is harder to bear than lack of truthfulness."

"I know I have often seemed not much of a man, Aunt Nancy, but that you should take me for so small and mean a——"

"No, no! I don't! It's inevitable. I don't blame you for it. I only ask you to realise that it is one of the forces arrayed against you, and the more insidious because it is within. See now, it is true you are giving up small things for a great one, but it's not to be forgotten that you are used, infinitely



used, to the small things. They acquire a specious but tremendous value through force of habit."

"My dear aunt, in all self-depreciation I do truly think you underestimate me. For one thing we shall not be living among my old associates—Heaven be praised!—but will be in the midst of primitive humanity which still sees clear."

"Yes, that will make all the difference," she conceded. "Heavens! If you were to try and live in New York among your mother's friends!"

"And then you don't give me credit for having it in me to be a man—the man Gunhild will make of me. That is exactly what she will do for me, teach me the heart-breaking triviality of the small things for which we give up our lives, and flood my days with the radiance of unconsciously great and noble ones. Think what a life we shall have—a life fit for the gods—free!—free!—and I'm big enough for it. I'm my father's son as you are his sister."

He stopped, panting a little, the weakness of the convalescent showing in his quivering, sensitive mouth. Closing his eyes, he went on in a dreamy

exaltation, "Think of the joy it will be to rescue her from this life, from darkness and imprisonment, to set her free in the sunlight, to make her impulses for good power for good. It is the opportunity of a lifetime. She is like Brunhilda—I have always said she was like Brunhilda—imprisoned by a spell here in the North, sleeping her years of youth and love away. And I shall be the Sigurd to awaken her to a life of joy——"

The old woman shivered and said gravely, "That's a bad comparison, Harry. The Brunhilda story ends tragically, you know."

The young man smiled confidently. "I don't drink charmed potions, Aunt Nancy. This shan't end tragically. Only give me Gunhild, and there is no possible tragedy for either of us."

Miss Fox rose. "It is a very serious resolution you are taking, my dear, but I'm proud of you for taking it. You have come to the cross-roads where we all stand some time and choose the strait and narrow path or the broad and fair highway. That choice is irrevocable. No one can go on the two

roads at once. They lead in opposite directions. You must know that there is no compromise. One must either conquer the world or be conquered by it. You cannot have in one life both worldly pleasure and real happiness."

The sick man raised himself from the pillows and answered with a ringing voice of decision, "I have chosen, dear aunt, I have chosen. And I thank God I have had the opportunity to choose happiness."

As the two faced each other resolutely, there was as little doubt or fear in one radiant face as in the other.

## XIV

### **The Final Ascent**

**I**T was ten days after the departure of the rest of the party before Henry Fox stood again upon the platform of hard beaten earth where he had spent his first night in Naesvangen. As he walked somewhat uncertainly over the threshold of the hotel door, he remembered that first night and the turning point in his life he had wished to make it. It had been indeed a turning point, but in how different a way from his sentimental planning! He smiled about him at the dark valley now grown so familiar and remembered how his imagination had been stirred by the saga-story of great and simple life and love, and how he had fancifully laid the scene of the narrative there. Now it was not fancy, but hard and fast and blessed reality.

He seemed to himself quite another person from the complex, hesitating product of unnatural condi-

tions he had been then. His sickness lay like a band of fire between him and his old incredulity of good, his old distrust of, and foolishly sophisticated distaste for, simple and obvious beauty and virtue. They seemed consumed utterly—all the forces within and without him which had driven him to the point on that night, when he was about to renounce once for all an insanely exalted ideal, grown so dim through neglect and blurred by careless cynicism as almost to have vanished from before his eyes.

He remembered Gunhild's first words to him. "Ah, you've wakened. Well, here I am!" No, he had not been awake. He had been upon the point of falling finally and forever into the ignoble sleep of oblivion which dulled the senses of the dwellers in his world, but now at last he was awake. And he was going to Gunhild to answer her, "Here I am."

He set out upon the road up the haunted hill, walking slowly and leaning on a cane. He was still weak, but the very absence of his usual consciousness of bodily vigour added to the extraordinary clarity

of his mind. He felt almost like a disembodied spirit, lifted high in a vague, dim exaltation where the sights and sounds of the actual world penetrated but faintly. The warmth of the sun, the grating of the gravel under his feet, the fragrance of the honeysuckle vine over Gunhild's window, seemed unreal and distant.

He stood for some time before the door without knocking, trying to overcome a dizziness. Now that the time had come he felt almost afraid; he had a momentary gust of the terror of the young before an irrevocable step, however eagerly desired. And then it seemed to him, in a reaction as sudden, that he could wait no instant longer, that he could not knock and enter quickly enough.

When he first stepped inside, he thought the room was empty, so still it lay in the sunshine, but looking about him he saw that Ingolf sat on a stool in a corner staring fixedly at him without moving. At the sight Harry's blood boiled. He had a blinding vision of the little creature as he had seen him last, and it seemed infamous—intolerable—that he should

be sitting so tranquilly in the peaceful home which Gunhild's tenderness gave him.

The young man took a long stride forward and half raised his arm threateningly. The dwarf blinked very rapidly, but seemed intrenched in one of his insolent silences. To Harry's astonishment he broke this after a moment by saying with a surprising mildness, "She has gone back to the *saeter* again. If you want to see her you got to go up there."

Harry's arm dropped and he stared blankly. It had not occurred to him that he would not find Gunhild in the valley. For an instant he staggered a little as though he had been dealt a physical blow. It seemed as though a great misfortune had befallen him, as though he could not endure this break in his plans. He recognised this as the petulant weakness of a sick man, and pulled himself together with an effort. Ingolf looked at him quite without his usual malice, and said soberly, "I am sorry she ain't here, but she's been gone 'most a week. You kin see her at the *saeter*, though, any time." He spoke almost

sadly and his face wore a look of childlike innocence.

Harry turned away without a word. "Good-bye," called Ingolf politely, getting down from his stool to close the door after his visitor. Even in his confusion and dismay at being stopped short in a course he had pictured as so rapid, Harry noticed the extraordinary change in the dwarf's manner.

He stood in the tiny garden before the house for several moments, trying to collect his thoughts, when it suddenly occurred to him that Gunhild might have left a message for him. Stepping quickly back, he threw open the door. Ingolf was standing in the middle of the floor, his face distorted with silent laughter, so malicious and evil a mirth as to make the abject little creature positively formidable. He did not see the young man for an instant—an instant in which Harry was blinded with rage. Flinging his cane aside, he fell upon the dwarf, seizing him by the throat and shaking him in a wrathful fury of which he was half ashamed; as finally casting his victim from him he watched him



gasp and struggle for breath. He himself leaned against the wall panting, his hand at his heart. His voice came in a loud whisper of rage. "What were you laughing at, you little devil, you! Was that a lie about Gunhild's being at the *saeter*? Is she here? Tell me the truth now or I'll strangle you."

Ingolf looked up meekly from where he lay like a heap of old clothes on the floor. "She is not here, she is at the *saeter*; that is true," he reaffirmed virtuously. "If you go to the *saeter* you will surely see her."

"Then what the devil were you laughing at? What have you done to her now?"

"I was laughing at a joke—at a Norwegian joke," answered Ingolf with wide, mild eyes.

A thousand wild conjectures sprang to Harry's tongue. "Is she ill? Is she dead? Have they kept it from me that I did not save her? What is the matter?"

The dwarf gathered himself up and climbed again upon his stool. With an animal-like quickness he snatched at a passing fly, caught it, and

crushed it in his hand. Then he sank together in a shapeless huddle, thrusting his head up sidewise at the man. He had the grotesque and repellent pathos of a sick monkey. "She is well—she is alive—you can see her at the *saeter*," he repeated in a hurt tone of injured honesty.

Harry stood for a moment more. He longed to make another assault upon the maddeningly irresponsible little lump, but he reflected that nothing could be obtained from him through violence. He had seen that tried before. He turned away again and strode unsteadily from the house, oppressed with fears, the world darkened by vague apprehensions. Ingolf's face stood between him and the happy visions which had filled his mind on the way up the hill. Not until he had obtained a solemn assurance from Rivedal that Gunhild was indeed well, had really gone to the *saeter*, and that nothing had happened to her, did he draw a long breath. Even then he felt constant premonitions of evil and a dull depression which could not be accounted for altogether by the delay he must suffer before he

could see her ; for he was by no means strong enough to undertake the trip up the mountain.

For a week he waited in an ever-growing impatience for his strength to come back to him. Once he started up the steep path, but after an hour's climb he was obliged to give it up, his head swimming and his heart beating so that he was all but suffocated. Every evening he sat out and gazed up at the green spot on the mountain in an impotent fury.

The end of the brief summer was coming now and toward midnight a veil of twilight fell. Once as he sat in the growing dusk, looking up at the *saeter* meadow which he could no longer distinguish, a little light shone suddenly from it, a steady little light which he knew to be Gunhild's lamp.

He smiled at himself, feeling his heart leap high like any lovesick boy's, and thanked Heaven that a boy's impulsiveness was still his ; and then thanked Heaven again that he gloried in his rush of sentiment instead of mocking at it.

The tiny yellow spark, lost in all the looming

vague bulk of the mountain, fired his heart and filled him with a resolution to ascend to the *saeter* the next day or die in the attempt. He made an early start while the mists still filled the valley. Rivedal had protested loudly against the undertaking as insane for a man still weak, and Harry slipped out quietly before any one was astir, to avoid discussion.

He walked along through the pearly fog, his footsteps echoing dully, deadened by the close-pressing mist. At first he fixed his mind on nothing but the material problem of sparing his strength so that he could complete the ascent. He forced himself to sit down and rest frequently. Indeed this was often a physical necessity, his knees trembling under him with a weakness that was almost pain.

Sitting thus, surrounded by the thick white mist, he seemed strangely cut off from all the living world, toiling wearily through a sort of solitary limbo. His past life rose before him in a series of fleeting pictures—his past life which he had so utterly renounced. In spite of the startling clearness with which he reviewed it, it seemed strange and

alien to him, like the life of another man. The deathlike blank of his sickness removed it to an incredible distance from him. It seemed to his fanciful mind that there was something symbolic about the whole experience, as though he had needed to go to the doors of death before he could see life.

He recalled his unhappy meditations after the first talk with his aunt, his hesitations, his doubts of himself, the ghastly times when all in the world lost its savour and colour and turned a sickly grey in his universal incredulity of any activity at all being worth an effort. He remembered his sudden reactions from Gunhild, his wincing at her speech, his distaste for a simplicity and innocence which seemed for a moment insipid—blinding flashes when he seemed to be suffering from an infatuation as silly as any ignorant boy's.

Struggling up the mountain to her, his soul on fire to begin a new life when her values should be his, such doubts seemed those of another existence. And yet, as he rested, panting, on a stone, he forced himself to realise that in all probability he had not

outgrown them. The habits of a lifetime are not to be eradicated in a single summer, even by the most epoch-making experience. He made himself remember that he was probably not even yet free from the danger of reactions and relapses. Not even Gunhild could make a man over in a day.

As he climbed up, the mist grew thinner and he could dimly see that there was sunshine ahead of him. Probably the *saeter* lay in the golden glow which Gunhild loved. He tried to hasten, burning with impatience. The mists in his mind also seemed to clear and lift. In his eager anticipation he lost sight of all doubts and fears, even the most reasonable, and saw only before him a life infinitely beyond even what he had conceived in his ardent and visionary youth. He was so weak that while he was actually climbing he could not think at all, concentrating his strength in an effort to conquer his own faintness and the mountain's height; but from one station of rest to another he grew more and more exalted. One by one his old ways of thought fell from him like fetters stricken away by a strong

hand. He no longer compared the life he was choosing with the one he had always led, he could analyse no longer, he could no longer think clearly, he felt blinded by the dazzling light which shone in his heart.

He toiled up the steep path, rejoicing in its difficulty. It was right, it was fitting that it should be hard. It was again symbolic. Gunhild dwelt in very truth on a mountain top, as he had felt the day of the trip to the *sæter*—that strange day of premonitory emotion.

He could not expect to reach her except through a struggle, through a renunciation of the easy ways of the world. He had lived in a valley, all his blind, slothful days; it was only natural that he should find it hard to ascend to a lofty eminence, that he should be a long time about it, and that he should need to force his weakness almost to the point of collapse to achieve it.

But now his struggling pilgrimage was over. The golden sunshine of his reward lay but a few steps beyond him. Through the half-dispersed mist

he could see that he stood on the edge of the open space about the *saeter*-hut. As he had prefigured, this was bathed in sunlight as clear as that glittering on the snow-field above it, across which the gaunt peak of grey stone cast a black, sidelong shadow.

As he stood in the edge of the mist panting, the door of the hut opened and Gunhild appeared. She looked down towards him, shading her eyes with her hand. It was almost as though she were expecting him, almost a mystic sign of welcome. At the sight of her radiant figure Harry's heart gave a great pounding leap in his breast. The end of his long journey had indeed come. Beside himself with agitation, his head swimming, he called weakly to her :

“Gunhild—oh, Gunhild! It is Harry!”

And it was with every trace of hesitation utterly swept away in an overwhelming flood of emotion, that he ran unsteadily across the open space, into the sunshine where she stood.



## XV

### **At Christianssand—The Eve of Departure**

**M**ISS FOX sank down on the low stone parapet with a sigh of utter weariness. "I couldn't go another step if it was to the gate of Heaven! and certainly not to clamber about this rocky place." The others stopped and stood about her uncertainly. They all looked tired and worn, but a restless uneasiness emanated from the group. The old lady waved them away peremptorily. "No, if you get any poor satisfaction out of tiring yourselves out, in Heaven's name don't let me hinder you. I'll just sit here quietly and watch the sun set, and when you finish your explorations come back and we can wait here until we see the ship come in. The traffic is not so feverish that we can't distinguish our big ocean liner from the fishing smacks. Thank the Lord! the packing is done, at least."

Caroline began a protest which the old lady cut

short. "No, I'm old enough to know what's best for me, my dear. Don't worry about me. I'm far better off here than in that stuffy hotel, and I'm looking forward to seeing the stars. Do you realise this is the first clear evening we've had since we came far enough south to get a little darkness? They say it's really quite black for an hour or two after midnight, and the stars come out just as they do at home."

Toward the end of this speech she caught Campbell's eyes fixed on her with an imploring eagerness of appeal. For a moment she steeled herself in despairing self-defence against him, but after an instant's pause she rose gallantly to the occasion.

"Pollie, would you like to stay here with me, dear?" she asked conscientiously.

"Pollie would better come with us," said Caroline decisively, taking the little girl's hand. Campbell sighed and tore at his moustache as the three walked away, and Miss Fox closed her eyes in a well-earned relief, as she found herself quite alone. She apostrophised herself aloud, "Well, Nancy Fox, you

poor, battered old thing, I really am sorry for you, when you've been driven to the pass of thinking you are tremendously favoured by fortune to be allowed to sit on a stone wall and try to rest for a few minutes." She smiled a little after this, but very soon her face relaxed from its invincible expression of cheer, and as she sat leaning back against a rock, the clear light of the sunset showed a very tired old woman, drooping in fatigue that was more than physical.

The past three weeks of travel seemed like a nightmare to her, and although she loathed the sea she was looking forward to their departure that night as at least a change in conditions. "There will still be Caroline, and Heaven knows it's no amusing business to travel with her in her present state of mind. But at least I shall be quit of the complication of having Campbell about, and perhaps I can eat something when I don't need to face his tragic eyes at meal-times."

The red-roofed village clustered about the harbour was the embodiment of evening calm—no

movement visible save a few faint plumes of smoke, dissolving before they could ascend to mar the sky's stainless clarity. The sun had already disappeared behind the low range of mountains back of the town but the sky was still a vivid flame-colour, which was reflected from the harbour's mirror and bathed in a red glow the long line of anchored vessels, their masts showing above the trees of a little green island like a second forest.

The flag hanging from a pole on the platform drooped in heavy folds, as motionless as if carved in wood. The low birch trees at the foot of the parapet stood holding their delicate fringes frozen by a spell of immobility. The only movement in all the scene was furnished by the slow, wheeling flight of a single gull, now flashing white in a downward swoop, now showing black against the brilliant sky: and by the regular march to and fro of a solitary sentinel on the parapet. Miss Fox sighed contentedly as she felt her tense nerves relax under the influence of the enchanting peace, and she closed her eyes.

When she opened them at a slight sound, Henry Fox stood before her, so deplorable a figure that she gave a shriek of dismay. It was as though she saw his ghost. He was deathly white, a sick pallor showing through the irregular stubble of dark beard on his face. There were no bandages about his head, but a long, red scar ran back from his forehead, showing clearly through the close-cropped hair. His eyes were bloodshot, as though he had not slept for long, and about his whole person was an indescribable effect of haggard desolation which made his aunt's heart stop beating for an instant.

"Harry! Harry! What is it!" she cried, clinging to him as he dropped in exhausted abandon beside her on the parapet. "What dreadful thing has happened?"

Before he answered the young man made an impatient gesture of apprehension. "How long can I see you alone? Will the others be gone long?"

"Yes, yes—for some time—oh, Harry, tell me——" She paused, her words cut off by the extremity of her conjecturing confusion.

The man began speaking with a dull and lifeless bitterness. "We think we are clever people—you and I, Aunt Nancy. Well, a bigger pair of blind, self-deceived, self-satisfied——! We think we are noble and unworldly and live on a high plane. Never was a coward so punished. It never occurred to us—either of us—did it, that there was another side of my 'problem,' as we saw fit to call it? We never once thought, did we, in our fat complacency but that Gunhild was mine for the asking, any time I chose to overcome my ridiculous bourgeois prejudices and condescend to ask——"

Miss Fox was trembling through all her body, but her voice still rang clear as she broke in sharply, "Harry, stop that, and tell me where Gunhild is."

Harry turned a dull eye upon her and went on, "Gunhild, my dear aunt, is not with me because she is with a better man—a man who more nearly deserves her than I."

Up to this point he had spoken with a heavy monotony, as of one utterly worn out by storm after storm of emotion, but here he stopped with a quick

indrawn breath and burst out in a sudden gust of loud despair, "But it's a mistake—it's all a horrible, horrible mistake! She should be mine—it can't be——"

The old woman fell back, alarmed by his outcry, and then commanded herself fiercely to quiet, putting a hand that did not tremble on his arm. "Harry, *don't!* You frighten me. You haven't long before the others come. Try and collect yourself and tell me clearly what has happened. Another man? There was no other man!"

Harry pressed his hands across his eyes and forced himself to a struggling calm. He spoke in a very low voice, hurried and breathless so that his aunt strained her ears painfully to hear him. "After you left, it was about ten days before I could walk much. Then I went to her house. She was not there. Ingolf said she had gone back to the *saeter*. I knew from his manner that something was wrong, but I never dreamed—oh, I've played the most abominably complacent rôle—I waited till I was strong enough to go up to the *saeter*. I almost killed my-

self on the ascent, I had so little strength. When I reached the *saeter*, Gunhild came to the door and looked down toward me as though she were expecting me—*me!* I was still very weak and I nearly died of the bound of joy my heart gave at the sight of her. Then I realised that it was not her goodness, not her beauty, not what I could do for her, or what she could make of me, not because she was a force strong enough to rescue me from a senseless, meaningless life I was not man enough to escape of my own volition—it was for none of those I was there. It was because she is the woman I love—I *love!* It was for herself—herself! If she had been anywhere else, anything else, I must have loved her.

“She’s all that’s good in me. She’s a part of me—as much as the breath I draw. I can’t conceive of life without her——”

His voice had risen and he was rushing wildly from one incoherency to another. His aunt again drew him back to a realisation of where he was. “Harry, I don’t yet know in the least what has come between you.”



"The simplest thing in the world—the most self-evident thing—another man. She loves another man. It is like that—so simple I cannot believe it. I could not believe her when she told me. It was like asking me to believe in the suspension of some inevitable law of nature. By all that's right and reasonable, she should love me—*me!* and by God! she would have—I feel it, I know it—if it had not been for Pollie. It is all so paltry, so ludicrous. It's as though one had lost one's life for having worn the wrong necktie——"

"Harry, *tell* me what happened! Pollie——?"

"Yes, *Pollie!* She heard, Gunhild heard, through Pollie, of course, it must have been. Nobody else could have told her. Every one in the village heard that Caroline and I were to be married in London as soon as we went back. That put a totally different face on my conduct—on hers—on everything. What she must have thought of me!"

Miss Fox recovered from her stupor of surprise to cry out, "Do you mean to say that Pollie said such a thing—that she told such——"

“Oh, of course, it was not intentional, just one of the child’s devilishly mischievous mistakes. It was probably a mistake in Norwegian—but it did for me as though she had given me a stab in the back.”

The other was still groping in a passion of bewilderment. “What other man—how did what Pollie say, do——?”

“Do you remember Gunhild’s saying that the minister’s son, an officer in the army, was to make a visit in the village with some friends? One of them was a lieutenant, who of course fell madly in love with Gunhild as soon as he saw her—what any sane man would have done. They came about a week before the excursion to the waterfall, and he made love to her all that week and during the month I was sick—he made love to her hotly, humanly, passionately as any sane man would have done—and she, despising me—she must have despised me!—alone, sad, imprisoned, and he young, strong, gloriously handsome, insanely in love with her, rich, noble, with a brilliant future before him, ardent, glowing—

Good Heavens! What woman could have resisted such a lover!"

The old woman turned even paler than she had been and put her hand to her heart. "No! Harry!" she cried in a choked voice, "you can't be telling me the truth. Gunhild wronged!"

The exclamation checked the other in a headlong flight of incoherence. He flashed a startled look at his aunt and was silent for a moment. Then he drew a long breath and spoke almost in his natural voice, for the first time. "Thank God!" he said slowly. "Thank God for one thing! I am not quite as low as I thought. At least that idea never entered my head until this instant. No, my dear aunt, she is about to marry one of the greatest 'catches' in the country, in the language of our world. The day before I crept painfully to the *saeter*, he had lightly sprung up the mountain like a strong man, asked her to marry him, and she had accepted him—of course. What else could she do but love him? It was for him she was looking when she came to the door and shaded her eyes——" His

voice suddenly broke into his breathless, agonised hurry as he went on. "But, by Heaven, it is me she should have loved—*would* have loved if I had spoken a month sooner—would have loved if she had not thought I was amusing myself with her. I know it! I know it! and that is the most damnable part of my torture—that it is all unnecessary—all a mistake—if it had been in the nature of things—if I had been repulsive to her, I could have endured it—but to have it come from a misunderstanding, from an accident, from such an utterly meaningless catastrophe as a child's chatter and a month's delay!"

Miss Fox's mind, racing distractedly about in questionings, came back to an earlier point, "How do you know it was Pollie? Did Gunhild tell you so?"

"No, no, she wouldn't tell me—of course, she would shield any offender. But it must have been more than random gossip, for she was so certain, so sure that for long she would not believe me. She insisted I was being false to Caroline. Oh, we had

a horrible scene of explanations." He shuddered at the thought. "I burn with shame when I think how I acted, like a cad, like a sick, weak, complaining puppy I was—not man enough to stand up and take my—and she, of course, forgave me when she saw how I was suffering. She pitied me—*pitied* me, when I had seemed to my own smug eyes a hero descending on her to rescue her. I could not contain myself—I can't yet. I raged. It all seemed like an unendurable dream from which I must awaken or die!"

"Harry, there can be nothing unendurable where you have acted only with the utmost honour and from motives few men would have had. You can have nothing to blame yourself for."

He glared at her savagely, including her relentlessly in his self-denunciations, "Nothing to blame myself for? You are more sunk in smug arrogance even than I. Do you remember our self-righteous, priggish little conversation the evening you went away? I was prepared—I told you—I was quite prepared to make the necessary sacrifice to

marry her. I was willing to cut myself off from my highly desirable world to marry her—— Of course I would hide her away in the West, where people of my superior sort could never see her, and where I would never need to blush for her incredible nobility and transparent truthfulness. Great Heavens! When I think that at that very moment another man had passed over, as nothing, obstacles a thousand times greater than mine—you know what the feeling of military caste is in Europe! He will give her a social position which I, with all my money, could never have secured for her! And I, hesitating and paltering over a word, an intonation! I had had the first opportunity, all those weeks before ever he came—I might have married her and have been half-way to America by this time—I can't believe it—I can't have been so stupid and so meanly a fool!"

His aunt again began a confused question and again he cut her short in a frenzy of impatient pain. "But, Harry, did you tell her——"

"*Tell* her? There was nothing I did not say and

do. I was beside myself. I descended to depths you would never dream possible. I appealed to her compassion—I tried to trade on the fact of having saved her life. I used my money—yes, Aunt Nancy, I tried to bribe her—to *buy* Gunhild. I was insane, nothing else! She had almost to kill me with the truth before I would believe her. Finally she said—always I hear that in my ears! She said—you know how her voice sounds and how like an angel she looks at you out of her fearless, honest eyes—she said, ‘You say you love me—that I must go with you because there is no world for you without me, because you love me with all your being, with all your soul, but listen—*so Siegfried loves me, and so, just so, I love him.*’ It was as though the sky had fallen on me to hear her say that—and she never stops saying it.” He tore at his collar to loosen it.

“But, Harry, how about her love for our West, and her sadness in Norway and——”

“Oh, I asked that. I left nothing unsaid. But, my soul! What is that if she loves him? A straw in a torrent. She even said she was happy that

there was some little, little sacrifice she could make for him, who was making so many for her. 'He loves Norway and so I do,' she said. Besides it is another bond, he has given her a worthy object for her noble impulses of devotion. You know all Norway is in terror of what Russia will do when she begins to reach out for ice-free harbours, and Norwegian patriots are throwing themselves heart and soul into perfecting the army—making it ready for a struggle to the death before they submit to Russian rule. It seems he—her officer—is preoccupied with that problem passionately, and she looks forward to devoting herself with him to this country. 'After all, it is my country,' she said, 'my father's country and all his fathers'. And now mine. I belong here—I am not an American any more. And my great-grandfather was a soldier.' "

Miss Fox faced her nephew with a sudden conviction, "Harry, you've made a mistake. She is not in love with him. All this reasonable talk from her means that she is fortifying herself in a resolution you had almost shaken. Her pride was wounded



when she thought you were amusing yourself with her, but she was certainly drawn to you at first and now if you——”

The young man shook his head dully. For an instant his excitement had left him and he drooped in a weak apathy that was painful to see. But he set himself steadily against his aunt's new idea. “No, you're wrong. I thought that at first, but it's not so. Again we misjudge her—we are never at her level of unconscious nobility. Do you remember my saying she was like Brunhilda sleeping in her ring of fire and that I would waken and rescue her? I had called her, I had broken through the flames, I swear she had stirred in her sleep, but when she opened her eyes to love, I was not there. By an incredible mistake they fell on another, who stood where I should have been, luckier—no, stronger and braver—than I—profiting by my path through the flames. It was to me the Fossegrim was beckoning so fatally—not to her.”

The old woman persisted in her new conviction—  
“No, Harry, you were wrong to come away without

more of a struggle. I feel as you do that if you love her so, it must be that she——”

Harry groaned aloud and turned his head from side to side as though in physical pain. “I haven’t told you all, Aunt Nancy. I am ashamed to tell you. When I finally went away from her, in all my confusion, there was still a grain of incredulity—of hope. I meant to stay and try again. Just after I entered the woods I heard some one coming up the path, singing the *saeter* song. I was in no state to meet any one and I stepped aside into the heather. I saw him as he passed—a great blonde Viking, bounding up that steep way as though he had wings—as well he might. That was just the difference between us, I thought—my painful and struggling ascent up a path he found so easy, my slow and hesitating arrival at a decision he had been man enough to make at once——” He hesitated, looking away miserably.

“Well——?” said his aunt inexorably.

“Oh, it was low of me—I turned and ran through the trees to reach the edge of the opening before

him. I wanted to watch their meeting—it was base, but I was beside myself—quite mad. Gunhild was standing where I had left her, still shaken by my violence, and she was weeping. I could hear the sound of her sobs—at least for that instant she was thinking of me—of me only.

“Then she heard the sound of his footsteps and as he came in sight, singing, calling to her, the sun on him, she looked at him! No! It was like a miracle! Good God! I thought I should die of the pain of it—she looked at him—oh, I can’t tell you how! Her face shone like an angel’s. She was all one flame of love. As I might have dared to hope she would look at me after years of devotion—as I might have hoped she would look at me in heaven! And he sprang up the slope—he, too, with a face shining like—and stricken silent as he—he took her in his arms——”

The young man suddenly broke off with a gasp like a drowning man’s and his voice rose in a wail of irrepressible anguish, “That is the picture I have always before me, day and night, night and day.

For God's sake, say something to me or I shall go mad!"

He stopped, shivering, and buried his face in his hands, drawing short, convulsive breaths. His aunt looked at him with the rare tears of old age in her eyes. For a moment or two she could not speak, her face drawn into a grotesque grimace of emotion. But when she finally broke the silence her voice was like a trumpet-call, as bravely cruel, "Henry Fox, I am ashamed of you. Stand up and take your sorrow like a man and your father's son."

The young man winced as though under a stinging lash, but he did not raise his head, and he answered with a steady, low-voiced fury of despair that was more frightening than his violence, "I know, I know. I am abject! But there is no strength in me—nor can I wish for any. Without Gunhild there is no life in my soul. I have no shame left at my weakness. I glory in it. You are right to scorn me—and I wish you joy of your easy scorn. What do you know of it—if you had ever known a tenth of what I—ah, it's easy to preach!"

## XVI

### "Right Dress!"

**M**ISS FOX suddenly cried out in an angry resentment and spoke with a passion as overwhelming as it was unexpected.

"'Easy to preach!' You think you are the first one in the world who has ever suffered. Every one always thinks that. Look at me! I have lived a long life of just such suffering as you endure now, only I have been forced to smile. Never once had I the relief of expression and sympathy as you now!"

The young man raised his head and gazed at her in an astonishment so profound that for a moment the anguish of his countenance was effaced. His aunt's gust of excitement passed. She went on very quietly, her voice of fatigue giving her amazing and momentous words a curious, impressive effect of impersonality.

"Yes, Harry, I too—see, you thought you knew

your aunt—closer to you than any other human being. You’ve had no conception of what my life has been—what a human life can be and still continue. And you’ve been blind! It is simply so obvious that no one has seen it. Why do you suppose I am dragging my weary old bones all over Europe when every fibre of me calls out for the quiet home my old age should have? Why am I devoting myself to a self-centred young woman for whom I feel no affection, even though I must respect her, and to a child whom I love but who fatigues me to the point of death? Why did I plan the scheme to sacrifice you, whom I love as my own son, so that Caroline should make a rich marriage? It never occurred to your discerning eyes that there was anything unusual in that, did it? Why do I all this? So that I may perhaps earn an absent smile of approval from the man I love—their father.”

Harry fell back from his aunt aghast, looking at her as though he saw her for the first time.

“It is so absurd as not even to be pathetic, is it not—that a weak old woman with only a few years

between her and the grave should be using your great word of love? It has been a hard master—that word. It has left me nothing at all of my own, and now it takes from me my last possession—my dignity in your eyes.”

She drooped for a moment pathetically, and the other did not quit his attitude of aloofness to console her. She went on unfalteringly, though with a miserable reluctance as though every word wounded her in the uttering. “There is nothing much to tell you, dear; to tell in words, that is. I have loved Caroline’s father all my life, and he has not loved me. Always before he was married I loved him—impossible to tell you the horror of those years of pleasant friendship—only think of feeling as you do now and living beside Gunhild on terms of cool and casual friendship! Well, we both grew middle-aged. I saw him becoming self-centred and coldly unhappy, and I could not raise a finger to help him. And then I saw a foolish, childish woman save him from himself by her very weakness and need of him. I saw his love for her transform him into the man I

had always known he could be, but could never help him to be. I saw him unfold into the very embodiment of the ideal he had always been to me—and it was the creation of another woman. I saw myself growing to old age, a figure not even tragic—suffering as only a young woman has a right—as it is not decent an old woman should. All that I saw and lived through, and even smiled. You *know* I have always smiled, Harry.”

Indeed she flashed at him a strange radiance, as she put her hand on his shoulder—“Come! Up with your courage, my boy. Don’t let an old woman outdo you! Stand up straight, and bear your burden. It will be the making of you—as it has been of me. You can’t say now I don’t know and sympathise. Sure, I sympathised long before you knew there was anything in your head and heart but chimerical dreams of a new life. I suddenly knew you loved her—and I knew what that meant, though you did not, and I was trying desperately to save you from my life. You saw how everything vanished when I knew that—all obstacles whirled



away. Gunhild was just as unsuitable to be your wife as ever; she was just the same honest, good, beautiful, dense peasant-girl she had been before; sure to give you untold misery and to cut off from you vast areas of the life that should be yours. Your foolish, prating reasons of what you could do for her and she for you were just as futile—but all that chaff was consumed utterly away when I saw, and before you knew it, that you loved her. That is a force no one dallies with if he has felt it—I shuddered and tried to rescue you from my misery, but I could not. And now you must bear it—you must stand straight like a man and bear it.”

Her hand dropped from his shoulder, her low quiet voice of rigid self-control ceased, and she stood up before him, valiant, inexorable. There was a long silence in which their eyes met, interpenetrated, and asked and answered strange questions. Then the young man caught her hands in his, and carried them strainingly to his heart. A low murmur of inarticulate exclamation came from his lips—“Ah—dear aunt—I haven’t words!—as always you are

my—ah, Heaven, what a woman!” he said brokenly.

She went on steadily, never removing her eyes from his face. “You are right in saying that to lose Gunhild entirely would be too heavy a punishment for a hesitation which you conquered in the end. But you have your reward although it is impalpable. You have the best of her. The part you really loved is yours. You have made it yours by loving her. Come, prove yourself worthy of her—if an accident of Fate has cheated you out of happiness with her. Do what you would have done with her—leave your foolish world of unrealities and go and live the life your father would fain have led. Be a man and take a man’s part in your own country. Prove to my brother’s spirit that one woman can inspire a man to do the good another woman hindered. It is your only hope—you will sink forever if you hesitate now.”

A spark of her flaming courage shone for an instant in her nephew’s tired eyes. “That is at least something to do—the nearest approach to living

with her. But, oh—*never!* Without her—it would be torture. No, I can't endure it! You see, it's harder for me than for you—it is not just that she doesn't love me, but it's the unbearable torment of being sure that she would—that she *would*, if things had been different. It's a mistake—a horrible mistake."

"You point out a certain, ultimate lack of fineness in her by believing that—that she could turn so from one love to another—but that is no matter. Nothing is any matter, if you love her. As to its being a mistake—it's always a mistake when the one you love does not love you, Harry."

"But see, we had everything in common—everything vital! We should have grown to be like one person. I felt in her my own best impulses—we were one mind—one person in two bodies—I had met my other self—she *should* have loved me. It is like tearing the flesh from my bones to give her up."

The old woman opposed her steady unwavering answers—"It is always like that. The one you love

should always love you, you think. It seems impossible otherwise. But so it is.”

The spell of her hypnotic self-control over the man suddenly broke. He sprung up from the parapet with a wild outcry of rebellious fury. “Yes, yes, so it is. So it is—and *why?* *Why?* Good God! *Why?*”

His violence shook her visibly. She wavered uncertainly, and her white face went a shade whiter. For the first time, he emerged from his inferno of suffering to think of her, and the thought calmed him for a moment. “Aunt Nancy, you’re ill. You’re almost fainting. Sit down. Lean on me—so.” He half took her in his arms, and sitting thus, her tired old head drooping on his breast, some moments passed in silence. They gathered a faint, mystic strength from being so weak together.

A rattle of drums startled them into observation of the outer world. The hour for changing the sentinel had come and the guard was about to escort him back to the barracks. The big peasant lads, burly in their ill-fitting uniforms, looked anxiously

at a trim young officer before them. He gave a word of command and, like automata, all together, they put their right hands on their hips with elbows out, turned their heads and eyes stiffly to the right and straightened their line, measuring accurate, equal distances from each other by their upraised elbows.

Miss Fox began speaking in a low voice, as though she was thinking out loud. "You ask why? Look at the soldiers and see. I don't know what that command is in Norwegian, but in America, it is 'Right dress!' And it is what we most of us are doing all our lives—looking to some one who, in turn, is looking to one further on, always separated by a space, small but impassable. See: all my life I have looked to Ralph Morton, he looks to his wife, and she to her pretty clothes and foolish social life. Why, she wouldn't leave her silly world of teas and dances and theatres long enough even to bring her daughters abroad. I was to do that, as I've always done everything in their household she didn't care to do; grateful for the chance of gathering a few

stray remnants of the affection lavished on her in such a golden shower. Campbell looks despairingly at Caroline—you would pity him if you could see him these days!—Caroline to you, oh, you might as well hear it spoken of! And remember if you wakened Gunhild to love and saw her give that love to another, Caroline stirred you to a desire for a man’s life, aroused you from your drifting apathy, and saw that new ardour bestowed on another. Caroline looks to you, I say; you to Gunhild; she to her officer, and he to his fatherland.”

Harry broke in with none of his former violence, but with a concentrated and consuming bitterness. “You but turn the knife in the wound. There is no reason why. There is no meaning.”

“Harry, you do not speak truth. Even as wholly ignorant and blind as we are, we can’t fail to know that there is a meaning if we do but open our eyes. Somehow it makes us of some disciplined use in the world, makes soldiers of us; somehow, somehow, *it’s the only way to straighten the line.*”

They were brave words, but she crept, shivering,

closer into his arms, and again they sat in silence, his head drooping above hers. It had grown quite dark as they talked, and suddenly the old woman's eyes caught a glimmer in the heavens. The stars were out, shining faintly against the pale sky, but still showing clearly in their well-remembered places. Low above the mountains swung the Great Bear, and a wave of indescribable emotion swept over her to see it. She was penetrated with a sweet, wild pain, of almost unendurable poignancy. Those mild golden inhabitants of the sky beaming upon her again!—It was like being wakened from a nightmare of discord, by a chord of unbelievable, remembered harmony. “Oh, Harry, look—look!” she cried, pointing up. She could find no words for her entrancing surprise, but she felt that he shared it. It was the first time they had seen the stars since all the strange experience of this eerie summer.

“It is like a strong hand pointing the way,” she told him after a pause, still looking fixedly at the constellation over the mountains. “Come, Harry, be like that. Point steadily to the north,—Gunhild’s

north, if you must,—but move in your appointed way, and do the work you were sent into the world to do—the better to do because you have yet to find it, and because you are not strong and simple enough to see it. But go and find it.”

They sat apart now, both gazing up into the dimly shining heavens, but they felt strangely close and for a moment half calmed, and peaceful. A confused sound of voices came from above them on the hill. “There are the others,” said Miss Fox in a tone of finality. She stood up, bravely erect. Harry was swept for a moment by a sudden gust of his sick uncontrol. “I must go—I can’t see them!” he cried wildly. “Aunt Nancy, you have saved my reason—all of me that’s worth saving. I will do as you say—I will do as Gunhild would have me—I submit—I have no more will to rebel—but I *cannot* see Pollie and think of what she has done. Just that one last horror of bitterness I leave. I think I—I’m afraid I *hate* Pollie!” He stooped to kiss the little old woman. “But I love you, dear aunt—dear——” He saw that she was in a passion of tears.



The tears came into his own feverish eyes, as he took her in his arms. She raised her quivering old face to his with a broken lament at his departure, but then, "No, Harry, don't pity me. It's really because I'm proud of you, and from relief to know you are coming out all right, that I—and I'm tired—very tired, that's all. Come, we'll fight it out, together! 'Right dress!'"

## XVII

### At Sea

**A**S Pollie disappeared for a moment down the dark deck, Miss Fox took a sudden resolution. "At least Caroline shall know what has happened," she told herself with a throb of pity for the girl by her side. "She shall not live in a sickening uncertainty as to what she has to expect." She spoke quickly as though to finish her speech before Pollie returned. "Caroline, I couldn't tell you before Pollie, but now I think you ought to know. That *was* Harry you saw jump down from the parapet, just as you thought."

The girl started from her attitude of limp dejection and turned toward the speaker a face white even in the dim light. Miss Fox did not look at her as she went on, "He came down to Christianssand on the chance of seeing me a moment before the boat

left. You mustn't think it was you he was avoiding. It was Pollie. He thinks she has done him a great although unconscious wrong."

She hesitated for words, and then, taking up with a relentless kindness the plainest possible ones, "In some way, through her careless chatter in her bad Norwegian, she gave the impression that you and Harry were fiancés and when Harry went to ask Gunhild to marry him he found she had been wholly misled by that, had thought he was playing with her, and in the month of his illness had engaged herself to some one else—a lieutenant in the Norwegian army. Harry feels very bitterly about it, naturally—though of course the poor child had no idea of what she was doing, and, although I did not tell Harry this, I think it might have turned out the same in any case."

She took quietly for granted that Caroline knew all of the conditions, crossing thus in one of her bold leaps the black pit of silence which had yawned between them ever since Gunhild came into their lives. They heard Pollie running back down the

deck. Caroline spoke hurriedly, "Did she *say* that Pollie told her?"

"No, she wouldn't say who it was—you know she was so fond of Pollie, but of course it must have been. It's so characteristic of the child, destructive as a little whirlwind."

Pollie's tempestuous arrival put an end to the talk. They sat for some moments on the deck, watching the lights of Christianssand disappear in the welcome darkness. Miss Fox could not see the girl's face, but she divined in the rigid figure and ominous silence that a struggle of some sort was going on. As the last light flickered out, and only the stars shone with a soft radiance upon them, Pollie cried, "Well, that's the last of Norway and Harry!"

Caroline stood up, her slender figure as proudly erect as ever, although her voice broke uncertainly as she echoed the child's words gravely, "Yes, that is the last of Norway and Harry."

"It's the last of Norway, to be sure," agreed Miss

Fox, "but why the last of Harry? He'll be coming back to his own again some day. Yes, I'm sure he will, Caroline."

"No, no, never!" said the girl with a quick decisiveness. "He—there is a barrier."

Pollie gave a sudden unexpected little sob. "What's the matter, dearie?" asked Miss Fox in weary alarm.

"I don't know!" The sensitive child nestled close to the old lady, burrowing her head among the wraps. "I don't know, except I feel so queer and scared and tired and—oh, it *does* seem so good to have it dark again!"

She lifted her head and looked up into the starlit blackness above them. "Why should a dear little girl like to have it dark?" asked the old philosopher curiously. The child shook her head uncertainly. "I don't think I know why—only it's just awful to live where it's light all the time. You *see* everything so. There isn't anything hidden. You never get a rest from seeing and seeing and seeing how things are. *Don't* let's go down to the cabin, where

it is light yet." And for a long half-hour the three sat silent in the dark.

When they finally reached the cabin and Miss Fox could see Caroline, she was shocked by her pallor and by the haggard misery in her eyes. The two elders went through the harassing inconveniences of unpacking and undressing in cramped quarters silently, but Pollie seemed quite herself again, babbling steadily, and touching with an inspired indiscretion on all the topics at which the others winced. "Wasn't it too bad, Mr. Campbell had to leave them! Wasn't he the *sweetest* thing anyhow? Why *didn't* Caroline marry him? It would be such fun to go to England to visit her. And didn't that look exactly like Harry who was on the parapet with Aunt Nancy?"

She was drawing breath for they trembled to think what new flight, when Miss Fox broke in, determined to stop her for a moment at least. "That *was* Harry, Pollie. He came down to say good-bye to me. He is very ill yet, and didn't feel strong enough to see all the party. He brought

some news from Gunhild. She is engaged to be married."

"Yes, I thought she would be by this time," returned Pollie complacently, splashing her hands up and down in the wash-basin, her usual substitute for washing them. "To that lovely lieutenant who was visiting at the minister's, I suppose. Yes, *I* knew all about that. All the children in Naesvangen did—and the grown-ups too. He was just crazy about her from the first minute he saw her. Old Tante Ingeborg was so interested. '*Gud bevor os!*' she said—that's a kind of a swear word that nice people use in Norwegian,—'Gunhild will get a husband after all. When she refused the blacksmith we all thought her only chance was gone, but here she is with a better lad yet.' It's a great thing for a girl to marry an army officer in Norway, you know."

Miss Fox recovered from her stupefaction and cried out with the severe and acute sharpness of unmitigated surprise, "You don't mean to say, Pollie Morton, that you *knew* about this all the time!"

"Yes, I did," Pollie assured her proudly. "Why,

all our crowd did, the children that I played with. Everybody in Naesvangen was talking about it. The day they came—the fine people from Christiania, you know—Gunhild was working in the hayfield next the minister's house. Lieutenant Eriksen went out to smoke a cigarette and when he saw her he let it fall like that"—she dramatised the scene with her toothbrush,—“and he said out loud so ever so many folks heard him, ‘Why, God bless my soul, that is the most beautiful woman in the world!’ Yes, he did, just like that. And three days after, he told the minister she was the best woman alive and he'd marry her if she'd have him. Tante Ingeborg's sister was working at the minister's and she heard him say it.”

Miss Fox turned to Caroline, with a tremor of apprehension at her silence. The girl was shrouded in her long hair, having brushed it in a dusky cloud over her face, and she stood quite still, although the quivering tension of her attitude penetrated this veil. She tried to speak twice and her voice failed her. Then, with a sort of hushed agony



of inquiry, she asked in a low, breathless voice, "Pollie, think back. Did you know this the day we went to ask Gunhild to go to the waterfall, when I found her by the river, washing?"

"My goodness, yes," said Pollie in entire unconsciousness of any coming storm. "It was a week before that it happened and—why, I guess it was that very day I heard about it."

Suddenly the quiet little cabin became a place of furious storm. Caroline's angry desolation seemed to fill it with turmoil, although she did not move from her place. She swept her hair aside and showed a face absolutely blazing with rage and her words fell upon the horrified child like molten lava. "Then, why in the world didn't you *tell* somebody! Anybody who drives us all mad by chattering all the time as you do, what did you *mean* by keeping this one thing to yourself! How did you *dare* conceal it from me! What wicked idea was in your head!" She stopped, choking, but Pollie's outcry of terror and lamentation left no breathing space for the tired old woman.

The child screamed and sobbed in uncontrolled hysteria, a grotesque little figure in her white night-gown, rubbing her eyes with soapy hands. "Why, Caroline Morton," she sobbed, "didn't you tell me, that day, just as hard as you could tell me, not to say another word about Gunhild? You said you were sick of hearing about her. I was just starting to tell you about the lieutenant—honest, I was—when you said to keep still about her. She did, Aunt Nancy, she did say that! Honest, she did! I thought I was being so good and doing just what you wanted me to—I've been just dying to tell you, it was so exciting—but I thought I'd please you for once in my life! Oh, Aunt Nancy, she did tell me not to say another word about Gunhild—honest—didn't you, sister?"

The little girl clung to Miss Fox, crying at the top of her voice, her incoherent self-justification lost in her storm of tears. The old woman thought desperately that she would certainly die of fatigue if she could not have a rest from the two noisy, violent children, but she took Pollie on her lap and

tried to soothe her. Caroline had retired again behind her veil of hair, and sat on the edge of the berth, an enigmatic figure of woe, whose misery the older woman pitied, but with a feeling that she did not fathom its depths. She felt again that she was by no means the acute observer she had fancied herself. Pollie's silence had apparently as tragic a meaning for Caroline as for Harry.

"Come, come, Pollie, Caroline didn't mean to frighten you so. We're all very tired to-night. Be a brave girl and stop crying. You did what you thought was right, and that's all we can expect."

The child was exhausted with her emotions and in a few minutes sat quieted, only a convulsive sob shaking her from time to time. Her eyes were already drooping heavily. "There! you're sleepy, dear. Let Aunt Nancy put you up in your berth and Caroline will go to bed in hers, and I'll leave you both to a quiet night." As she spoke she thought with a yearning longing of her own little solitary cabin as a haven of calm. She lifted the heavy

child to the upper berth and tucked the covers about her.

At this point Caroline began braiding her hair, her white fingers flashing in and out of the dark mass in a feverish haste. When she had finished she flung the long braid back over her shoulders and turned to Miss Fox a face set in a stern and youthfully tragic desolation.

"Aunt Nancy, will you do something for me? Will you sleep in here and take care of Pollie, and let me spend the night in your cabin? I'm—I'm not well—and I don't feel—I can't *bear* to be with Pollie to-night."

Miss Fox gave an exclamation of utter dismay. "I'm very tired myself to-night, my dear——" she began, but Caroline interrupted in a self-centred paroxysm of suffering, "Aunt Nancy, I wouldn't ask you if I didn't feel—oh, auntie, I *can't!* I *must* be by myself!"

For one moment her mask slipped and Miss Fox was horrified by the passion of misery that raged in the girl's dark eyes.

"Yes, yes, Caroline—certainly, my dear, I'll take care of Pollie." She looked with a frightened pity at the tall figure, and made an impulsive step towards her, but Caroline was again armed and repelled all approach. "Thank you," she said gravely, "good-night," and was gone.

Miss Fox sat down heavily on the uncomfortable camp-chair which was the only furniture of the tiny room. She was so tired in body and soul that she could have wept aloud like a child, but in a moment she rose wearily.

Pollie, who had already dropped asleep, was tossing restlessly about and the covers were slipping from her berth. Miss Fox climbed on the unsteady camp-chair, threatening to shut itself up with every move she made, and tucked the blankets in, tightly.

When she stepped down she stood for a moment gazing at her reflection in the little glass. She looked to herself very, very old and battered—"and I feel worse than that," she meditated. She thought of her comfortable home in New England, standing

empty in all its peace and tranquillity. The vessel, passing out to open sea, gave a sudden lurch and she almost fell, staggering clumsily across the cabin. At the same moment she felt the first qualms of the seasickness she so dreaded.

"I must get to bed at once," she thought, but she reached up with her rheumatic old arms to put her hair in curl-paper. "Caroline is so distressed to see my hair stringy," she sighed.

For some moments she stood quite still, her face unutterably sad under its absurd fringe of stiff paper rolls. "Ah, poor Harry!" she said, under her breath, and then with a wry little smile, "*Poor Harry!*"

A sharp twinge of pain in her hip made her sit down hastily, with an exclamation of discouragement. She thought of the weeks of incessant travel ahead of her with her two charges, and her flesh felt sodden with anticipatory fatigue. "I am an old woman," she said to herself querulously, "a sick old woman, and I ought to be safe at home."

Her eyes fell on a picture of Pollie's father which

the child had left lying on the foot of the lower berth. She looked at it in silence.

Pollie turned impetuously and the blankets slid from her berth to the floor. Miss Fox surveyed them in dismay. Then she knelt down stiffly, pulled a heavy satchel from under the berth, extracted from it four large safety-pins, and with these and the blankets climbed again upon the uncertain camp-chair. As she reached painfully over the sleeping child and pinned the blankets to the mattress she gave a little sob of forlorn weariness. "Come, come, Nancy! Right dress!" she told herself, but the voice she tried to make steady quavered.

A moment later as she disposed her tired old body in the hard narrow berth, the picture fell out with a light rustle on some papers on the floor. She reached down and put it away safely in Pollie's satchel. "Now, *right dress!*" she cried again, and this time the tone was indomitable.







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